THE CHALLENGE

WARREN CHENEY

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THE CHALLENGE

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He kept his gaze fixed as before and pointed *See page 353*

THE CHALLENGE

By

WARREN CHENEY

Author of
The Way of the North, etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

N. C. WYETH

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CHAPTER I

THE SECRET OF THE BAY

Because they are benighted and still believe in ghosts, the Alaskan natives never pass by night through the long arm of Ltua Bay that is its sole connection with the sea. And because in that far northern place for half the year the time is mostly night, until the Russians came the bay lacked much of its full share of human use and occupancy.

The Russians, perhaps, were as superstitious as the brown men they found in the new place, but the feeling moved them in a different way. They admired the bay's long entrance channel, smooth and straight as the trunks of the yellow firs along its banks; they were grateful for the quiet of the inner harbor space; they marveled at the even way in which the basin had been hollowed out on either side of the entering stem like the arms of a great T; but most of all they read a superstitious meaning in the outline of

the harbor as a whole. To them it was a gigantic cross of water laid upon the land, and, with the pleasing arrogance of the Russian mind, they made sure to themselves that it was a sign that God vouchsafed to them a shelter in this inhospitable land and looked with favor on their somewhat doubtful schemes.

In grounds for conviction about the place the natives had logically the better point. The Russians claimed no basis for their superstition other than their hope. The natives could defend their case with a grim record of the unfortunates of their kind who had set out to run the channel from the harbor to its mouth and had not come back again. Somewhere between these two points they and their boats had been spirited away, and this as often in clear weather as in foul. It stood to reason, therefore, that the ghosts of these lost ones might well be lingering permanently thereabouts.

The Russians listened lightly to these stories and said to each other that the natives lied. But they could not so dispose of the records left by La Perouse, the adventurous Frenchman who discovered the bay in 1786, and whose statement, embodied on a monument there, went to show

that the reports of the grim disappearances of the channel were of a surety true. His inscription chronicled that on a certain dreadful day two of his boats with twenty of his men had dropped down from the landing to take soundings at the harbor's mouth. The sea was smooth and the morning clear and there was nothing in earth, or air or sky, to speak of danger or to give alarm. The boats were seen to pass in between the low cliffs that stand on either side of the passage gate—and that was all. They did not reach the open sea and they did not come back to port again.

The people sent in search of them passed without adventure and in safety through the mouth of the runway and out to the open water beyond. But the two boats with their load of human freight that had gone before them had, in the same distance, in some occult way, vanished completely. Only, the next day, just within the heads on the northern side, they found two bodies traveling round and round and spinning upon the shoals like fish at play; and so, without much thought, they divined the fate that had come to all the rest.

But the Russians who profited by La Pe-

rouse's discovery and two years later took possession of the bay, were wholly of the *promyshleniki,* the soldier hunters, on whose hardihood and strength of arm the great Fur Company depended to collect its pelts and to spread and hold its sway. These men cared little for the good or bad reputation of a place so long as it afforded proper shelter and abounded plentifully in the fur-bearing animals of which they were in search. They accepted both the natives' tales, which they did not believe, and the tragedy of La Perouse, which they could not deny was true, with little more than a feeling of curiosity over a state of affairs they could not understand.

In time, more than one of these doubters gave his life to the firmer establishment of the tradition of strange disappearance that had fixed itself about the channel's lower end. These men went out of the fellowship about them in the same unexpected and unceremonious way, without a word to point out why or whither they had gone. Worse than that, in each case, they took with them in their flitting such of the company's guns and boats as they had with them at the time they disappeared.

The men themselves might have passed and occasioned small remark; but the loss of the property of the company was another and more serious thing. And so from Kadiak the order came definitely that the matter should be observed until the mystery of these sudden goings was unraveled and made plain.

Thus watched, the place gave up its secret—or at least such part of it as made it possible to guard the company from further loss. For twenty hours out of the twenty-four the channel proved as free from treachery as was professed by the smooth promise of its face. But twice in the twenty-four, there came a time when to venture on it presaged certain death.

At a point some hundred yards inside its mouth, where on either side high cliffs rose up perpendicularly from the sea, at the moment of high water, when the tide was at its supreme depth, with the first turn toward the ebb there began to run toward the cliff on the northern shore a swift and sudden current. There was no great disturbance of the surface of the sea except that in front of the cliff the water began to stir uneasily and eddied and bubbled as if about to boil. But any ill-fated thing caught

within the circle of that magic draw, turned from its course with quickening speed and moved with irresistible motion in toward the central whirl. Once there, it paused for a breathless moment, balancing itself as if in dizzy preparation for the plunge, and then settled slowly down with the suck of the vortex beneath it and so disappeared for ever in the waves. But in an hour the whirling ceased, the tide ran out in quite the ordinary way and the channel was again as safe and smiling as before.

These were the things the watchers saw and therefore the portion of the water's secret they came to understand. The remainder of the riddle—the reason for this strange condition and why this gigantic trap was thus set twice daily —was something they never sought to solve. Whether it was due to the tide, or malformation of the rocky channel floor, or, more likely, the presence of some hidden under-channel running to the sea which filled at the great tides until it siphoned out to make the sudden draw, it was beyond their ken or care; and, for that matter, has remained so to this day.

It was enough for them that the thing was

there, yet could be trusted to confine its mischief to the times of turning tides. So they used the channel at all other times without fear, and through it the company's property came to no further loss. But the natives, being superstitious, put small faith in the explanations that they heard and continued to use the outlet in the day alone.

But at the determined times, there was no doubt as to the channel's danger for both brown men and white, and it was the conviction of this truth that made it impossible for Mikhail Etolin, the lieutenant in charge of the summer post, to sit comfortably at table while it was on his mind; and which took him out of the coolness of the barrack building at the unusual hour of noon.

He stood for a moment outside the door, panting discontentedly in the humid heat and gazing interrogatively around the place with his fat, half-closed eyes. Then, with a grunt of satisfaction, he located what he had sought to find, and, holding up his hat so the air circulated under it as he walked, he set out at a leisurely pace and went shambling slowly toward the beach.

There was but one person at the landing, a young man of perhaps twenty-five or six, who sat comfortably in the shadow of a boat that had been overturned just out of reach of the tide. His tools lay near him on the ground and he was busying himself with the consumption of a large piece of bread and a strip of brown dried fish. He paused in his occupation as the officer approached and saluted him with the hand that held the bread.

"Well, your Well-born," he said good-humoredly, "are you trying to find a spot that will be more cool?"

"Akh!" returned the officer when he got his breath, "God never made a country such as this! To believe it would be to make heathen of us all." His voice was wheezy and he wiped the perspiration from his forehead as he spoke. The younger man laughed and gave a little shrug to his shoulders.

"You should not be so fat, Mikhail Sergeievitch," he said mockingly.

"If I had been thin," returned the officer with a sorrowful shake of his head, "I should never have left Russia for service in this God-forsaken place!"

"That was sheer vanity, your Well-born," replied the young man lightly, "and deserves no sympathy at all."

"Vanity or no vanity," said the fat man testily, "it was as good a reason for coming as chagrin at being flouted by a girl." The young man flushed consciously and looked quickly at Mikhail Etolin as if about to answer the challenge thus advanced.

"There was no trouble with the girl—" he began hastily and then, as his discretion got the better of his eagerness, he stopped. He paused for an instant while his self-control came back. Then, turning to the other with his former smile, he said quietly: "It will be cooler soon. It is already thickening out there in the west."

Mikhail Etolin let his glance run out along the channel until it rested on the open sea. Near in, the air was clear and the water reflected sharply the bright noonday light; but off to the west there was no decisive line where the sky and water met. The perspective faded out across the tops of the lazy swells into an ultimate gray blur that had about it the premonition of growth and movement which sailors

say betokens wind. He considered a moment in silence.

"Fog," he said finally, with an air of conviction. "It is time for the change, though. This is the third day. You may get it," he added meditatively, "before you speak the boat, but it will not reach us, probably, until to-night." The young man gathered himself and sat up with sudden interest.

"What boat?" he said expectantly.

"The lookout has reported one as coming from the north." The young man got quickly to his feet and shaded his eyes with his hand.

"I do not see it," he said, gazing intently up along the coast. "And anyway, it is not time for the regular boat."

"That is what troubles me. It must be from Yakutat, yet it may have people in it who do not know the danger of the bay. You can not see it yet. It was beyond the headland and close in to the shore. I think you had better go out to meet it and see that they do not try to come in through the channel while the tide is on the turn." The young man went down toward the beach to where he could measure the wet strip with his eye.

"There is no hurry," he said coolly, as he came back. "It is fully two hours yet before the turn."

"Suit yourself as to that, Ivan Egorovitch," replied the officer with his customary shrug. "Only do not forget and arrive beyond the need."

"I will not," replied the other positively, and Mikhail Sergeievitch, with a sigh of self-pity for the new exertion he must make, turned himself about and began slowly to climb the hill. Ivan Egorovitch watched him for a moment with indecision in his face. Then he went swiftly after him along the path.

"Mikhail Sergeievitch," he said humbly, "I am sorry that I disturbed you by saying that you were fat." The officer paused and looked around at him, his puffy face wrinkling good-naturedly into a smile.

"And how about the girl?" he panted. "Am I to ask you also to forget?" Ivan Egorovitch's face flushed, but his voice remained steady as before.

"That is why I came," he said quietly. "I myself had already forgotten about the matter and I wanted to say that it would be bet-

ter if you forgot it, too." He did not wait for further answer, but turned on his heel and went swiftly back toward the beach. Mikhail Etolin stood still and watched him, with the twinkle still shining in his eyes.

"Akh! what a thing it is to be young and able to forget like that!" he chuckled. "It is not all of us who can set a thing aside and yet keep it so surely with us all the time. It is magnificent!" He shook his head and grinned again to emphasize his enjoyment and continued so to nod and chuckle to himself at intervals until he had traversed the whole space that had separated him from his house upon the hill.

CHAPTER II

IVAN MEETS A GHOST

In spite of his feeling of self-certainty, Ivan Egorovitch went about his mission with an uneasy mind. As he sent his boat skimming over the dimpling water of the runway, he put resolutely from him the thought of the old trouble that Mikhail Etolin had called back, and let his eyes take as eagerly the familiar details of earth and sea and sky as if there had been no other themes of interest in life.

At the great draw he pulled the boat across to the northern wall and set himself to look down industriously into the depths of the blue water, as if in belief, by some sudden comprehension, to surprise the unwilling secret of the place. It was a spot that always held a fascination for him, with its sunlighted waters and sinister threat of a relentless treachery, against the exercise of which it seemed so humanly to bide its time.

This done, he paddled on lazily to the channel's very mouth, and landing, tied his boat and climbed the low cliff to the rocky point on the southern shore which commanded the best view of the open sea. There was yet not even a distant speck to show a boat in the northern offing, and after a moment's gaze that took in the empty waters, the abrupt and somber cliff line with its effeminate cap of green, and the vague spread of mist along the western horizon, which, even while he was coming, had grown and risen till it stood well overhead, he settled himself at the edge of the grassy plateau, to lie at length and await in patience the coming of the vessel that he sought.

The North is never more attractive than at this culminating season of its growth. The reckless summer crowds into its ephemeral day a display that would serve for months of decoration in a slower clime. In six short weeks from frost, the April grass, the flowers of June, and the full completion of brown seeds and pods come and pass in turn, and the sun gathers in the breathless air the warmth and languor of a tropic coast.

But the softness of the North is not a soft-

ness that inspires trust. There is the charm, the promise and the wonderful show of peace; but behind the flowery perfection there is always a suggestion of the grim and wintry desolation that is its primal heritage and part—the pricking in the velvet that tells of the hidden claws.

The riot of summer green lay on, but did not entirely hide, the sharp and haggard outline of the coast. The birds, cheerful enough at morning and at night, were chary of disturbing the close noonday hush, and the few songs that persisted served rather to accentuate the depressing silence that at all times hangs like a shadow on the land. It was the sun, not the earth, that was debonair and kind, and in the shade and close to the ground, there lurked even in the noontide the dismaying certainty of cold.

Five years in the company's service had accomplished for Ivan Egorovitch a full familiarity with these things, and it may be that in ordinary hours they would have brought to him no thought. But it is a different thing when a man finds again at heart a pain that he believed had been completely overcome. He had no

mind to give up to it as he lay and smoked and resentfully felt it stir him there within. It was an uncomfortable fact and an ever-present one down in his subconsciousness, and his tilt with Mikhail Etolin had set the current bubbling upward again irrepressibly toward the light. He could not himself have told where the conscious resistance weakened and the unwelcome pressure gained the upper hand. But in the end, the quiet of the place, the melancholy wash of the surf, and the chill that came up through the grass roots from the frozen ground beneath, had their way with him, and with a shiver he let his mind come squarely round to the thing he had set aside.

What did he have in life that really counted for him in the end? Was it home? In answer there came up before him in sardonic vision, his bare barrack room, scantily furnished with chair and table, and in a corner the pile of tumbled covers that he called a bed. Was it friends? Who, now that Stepan Skuratof, his blood-brother, had been moved to Yakutat, was there at Ltua to answer to the name? No one but the dog he had raised and the tame gull with the broken wing that came to him when it

needed to be fed. Was it advancement? He had been in the service now five years and in that time the lieutenant had given him practically no assignment more important than to mix the sour dough for the mess *kvass*.

With a sigh of unreasoning impatience, he reached his hand out, and drawing down a branch of a bush there by his head, he began to strip it of its leaves and flowers. Why had these things all come to pass? And as if in answer, there came to him the vision of a dark, girlish face, a stir of garments and the warm touch of a hand.

There was no bitterness for him in the recollection, for as he told Mikhail Sergeievitch, in his relation with the girl it had not been she who was at fault. She had been more than kind and to his glances had lifted honest eyes. It was her father who had interfered and, like a laggard lover, under the pressure of parental disapproval, without a declaration, he had let himself be pushed aside.

This had been the beginning of his drifting, and when, two years later, the girl had married another man, he had cut loose entirely from his native place and wandered farther and far-

ther to the east until at last he had drifted to this ultimate Russian shore.

"I should have stayed!" he said to himself with a sudden sick distaste. Raising himself on his elbow, he reached forward and broke off the branch he had been stripping and looked it over critically from end to end. The movement was unconscious, for his mind was still filled with a dull resentment at the loneliness of his daily life, and the worst of it was there seemed to open for him naturally no definite avenue toward its escape. He could not go back to the girl he had left, because she was already married to another man. The chance of finding another, should he venture to return, seemed despairingly remote, and here in the new settlement there was small opportunity unless he chose to take a native for a wife.

He laughed aloud when he first thought of this alternative. Then he remembered the house of Gavril Rudnef, who had taken to himself in permanence a Thlinkeet wife and whose comfort was the envy of every hunter of the post. His was a clean home and cheerful, and the woman seemed not to require beating more often than if she had been white.

"They are not so bad, the brown ones!" he said softly to himself. He laughed again as the humor of the thing came home to him and rolled himself over on his face.

"I'll gamble on it," he exclaimed gleefully. "Both ways shall have a chance." He sat up and reached for another branch on which were still open flowers. "I will do as the girls do," he said to himself, "and pull the petals for a choice."

But as he settled himself for a decision, he chanced to raise his eyes above the low shrubbery about him, and, gazing out to sea, saw that the boat he sought had come into sight while he had been idling and was already fairly close at hand.

His mood changed on the moment and he got eagerly to his feet. The strange vessel was a large one and from the speed it made he surmised it was racing with the fog in the attempt to reach the harbor before the bank of cloud should cover it and so shut out the outline of the coast.

Ivan Egorovitch watched the craft speculatively for a moment and then made ready to go down to his boat. The excitement brought

back to him his usual poise and he forgot the depression that had so lately weighed him down. But before going, he stooped and broke from the bush an armful of the blossoming branches he had picked before, and, carrying them with him, he threw them into the bottom of the boat.

"You lie there," he said with a laugh. "There is no time now, but when there is leisure, we shall have our test."

The tide was almost at the full and he knew that the coming boat must wait until the lowering of the water put an end to the great draw. It must surely come in to him where he was and his first impulse was to wait. But his curiosity was the stronger prick, and, getting into the boat, he cast off and pulled impatiently out into the open sea. From time to time he stopped and rose in his place to see that his course was shaped to intercept the stranger craft. At first he saw it clearly as it rose on the higher swells, but it was not long before a whirl of mist swept over it and he could only guess how near to it he was.

When he, too, reached the fog-line, and the gray cloud shut away the sun, he stirred himself more strongly lest the *bidarka* should miss

him and slip by unobserved. He stopped rowing and, raising himself upon his knees, listened intently for some sound that should signal its approach. It was still too far away, however, and after a moment's waiting, he put his hands to his lips and through them called aloud.

The sound was scarcely still when out of the distance there came a faint but unmistakable reply. Shouting an answer, Ivan Egorovitch seized his oars and sent the boat in the direction from which the sound had come. He continued to call at intervals and turned his course to suit the answering shout. His ear was good, and he felt without seeing that the two boats were slowly but surely converging.

When it did come, the great canoe burst on him out of the mist with a suddenness that was wholly a surprise. It looked so big in the fog and towered so above him as it came, that Ivan Egorovitch involuntarily checked his course and backed away that it should not run him down.

The people on it saw him almost as he discovered them and, with a final shout of greeting, threw him a rope with which to draw himself alongside. It was a row of strange faces which looked down on him, but among them

almost at once he caught one that was as familiar to him as his own. He threw up his hands with a little shout of joy.

"Stepan Dmitrievitch!" he cried, "are you indeed come back?" He awaited no further invitation, but, standing up, caught at the gunwale of the *bidarka* and hoisted himself unceremoniously aboard. Stepan Dmitrievitch seized him as he came over the rail, and, wrapping his arms about him, kissed him vigorously on each cheek.

"I thought it would be you," he said excitedly, "if only that it was you I wished most eagerly to see."

"I had given you up," replied Ivan Egorovitch simply. "They told me you were to stay at Yakutat for the construction of the sleds."

"So I was, but the order came to make Ltua an all-year station from this time. The people and the things were too much for the regular boat and the *galiot* that brought them stopped only to discharge before turning back. All must be sent and I was the only other man who knew the entrance to the bay."

"That is why I came. The fat one sent me to warn you of the tide."

"How is it? Can we go in?"

"Not for a space. It is almost at the full." Stepan Dmitrievitch shrugged his shoulders with a sudden discontent.

"It will be an hour, then, at the least. But," he added joyously, "I shall not care, now that I have you." They still stood with hands clasped, gazing like children into each other's eyes.

"The place—" cried Stepan Dmitrievitch impatiently. "Tell me about the place!" Ivan Egorovitch laughed.

"There is not much to tell," he said, "though it has been so long. The fat one is good-natured if he is not seriously crossed; Luka Odintzof has engaged a new wife for the coming year; Vassili Leskin has had the scurvy and will lose his legs; and Moissei Gvosdef—the little man—is dead." The light went out of Stepan Dmitrievitch's face and he looked from side to side to see if any one had overheard.

"Dead!" he said, "Moissei Gvosdef! Speak lower. His father is here with me on the boat."

"His father!"

"Yes. He is a priest and was sent out for

the permanent camp." Ivan Egorovitch scornfully shook his head.

"It is hard to believe," he said, "that Moissei Gvosdef would be missed by any one."

"He is his father," replied the other reprovingly, "and he has talked much of him on the way."

"And did you not tell him the truth?"

"Why should I? How did the man come to die?"

"I do not know. It only happened yesterday. Eustrate Polutof and Ivan Paxin brought him in and Mikhail Sergeievitch told them not to say. They will bury him to-night." Stepan Dmitrievitch raised his eyebrows in significant understanding.

"The fat one never liked him," he said soberly, "but I scarcely thought it would come to that!" Ivan Egorovitch shrugged his shoulders in his turn.

"It may not be," he answered. "There was no one among us sufficiently his friend to care to take the matter up."

"Well," said Stepan Dmitrievitch softly, "violence or no violence, it is good for the settlement that he is dead."

"He was a cur!" burst out Ivan Egorovitch, and spat vigorously into the sea. "Is the father like him?" he asked.

"I can not tell," said Stepan Dmitrievitch. "I have not seen enough of him to know. If you want to break the news to him, I will have him called." He made a movement as if to go forward among the men, but Ivan Egorovitch caught him by the arm.

"Wait!" he said. "I did not come here to bring bad news. Let him learn it when he gets ashore." Stepan Dmitrievitch paused obediently and opened his mouth to speak; but before the word was out there was an interruption that drove the matter from his mind. It was a girl's voice, soft and pleasant, coming from beyond them at the stern.

"There are flowers in that boat, Stepan Dmitrievitch," it said reproachfully. "Why have you not had them brought on board?" Both men turned in the direction of the sound and Stepan Dmitrievitch spoke, but Ivan Egorovitch did not hear him and stood looking at the girl as if he had seen a ghost.

"Varenka!" he said under his breath, and the exclamation had in it both a protest and a

call; "Varenka!" He stood for full a minute looking at her in the same incredulous surprise. Then, as if bent on proving the reality of her physical presence there before him, he went toward her, stepping cautiously and without taking his eyes an instant from her face.

"Varenka!" he ejaculated wonderingly, "is it really you?" The girl was visibly startled and drew back from him with an air of suspicion and surprise. But at the name, she raised her eyes to his in puzzled inquiry that grew to comprehension as she recognized who he was.

"Why, it is Ivan Nilof!" she said eagerly. "Do you not know me? I am not Varenka, but Motrya—and you did not know!" He took the hands she offered, but stood stupidly gazing at her with the same devouring eyes. The girl grew conscious under the hungry look and the color began to rise and flutter in her cheeks.

"Motrya—" he began unsteadily, "you can not be Motrya. She was a child!" The girl's eyes lighted into laughter and she shook him impatiently by the hands.

"And how many years is it, Ivan Egorovitch, since you knew me as a child?"

"True," he said slowly, "it is a long time. But if you are Motrya, why do you look so exactly as Varenka used to look?"

"Is it a crime," she answered, "that you make it a reproach? As I remember it, you did not use to think she was so plain!"

"She was beautiful!" said the young man impulsively. The girl flushed at the indirect compliment and drew away her hands.

"I did not know you were here," she said, "or I would have been more satisfied to come."

"Why did you come?" he asked.

"There was no choice. When my father and Varenka and her husband came, they brought me with them whether I would or not." Ivan Egorovitch drew in a sudden breath and looked uneasily toward the stern of the boat.

"Varenka—" he said, "is she, too, with you here?"

"Oh, no," replied the girl. "She is still at Yakutat. Only my father is here. Zakar Medvedef's wife agreed to care for me and it was more convenient that I should come with her." The young man remained silent for a moment, but his gaze came thankfully back to the girl's face.

"But you are all to live at Ltua?" he asked finally.

"Yes. Ossip, Varenka's husband, and my father are in the company's employ."

"I am glad of that," he continued. "Even with Stepan Dmitrievitch to comfort me, the life here at the best of times has not been over full."

The girl looked at his companion with a friendly glance.

"Then you have known Stepan Dmitrievitch before?" Ivan Egorovitch turned to him with a smile.

"Ask him," he said. Stepan Dmitrievitch had watched in silence, but with growing interest, the demonstration of acquaintanceship between Ivan and the girl. Rolling up his sleeve, he came forward and put out his arm. Ivan Egorovitch loosened his sleeve and extended his own arm till it lay close to the one Stepan Dmitrievitch had put out.

"He is my brother, Motrya Petrovna," he said earnestly. "His blood is in my veins and mine in his. Look!" he added, placing his finger on the two arms just above the wrists, "you can see the scars." The girl bent gravely for a moment above the hard, white lines. Then

she looked up into Ivan Egorovitch's eyes with a shrinking that was almost disgust.

"Did you make those scars yourselves?" she asked.

"Of course," said Ivan Egorovitch. "It was a bond." Motrya Petrovna shivered and looked thoughtfully down at her own smooth wrists.

"I could not do that," she said. "You must have cared for each other very much." The two men's faces lighted sympathetically as they looked into each other's eyes and, after a moment's pause, Stepan Dmitrievitch said with dignified simplicity:

"Yes, it is very much." The girl stood considering the matter seriously, and listened unconvinced.

"I could care, myself," she said defiantly, "but it is stupid to hurt one's self like that."

The relationship was so sacred a thing to the two men that for the moment Ivan Egorovitch was disturbed. He held himself well in check, however, and answered so as to turn the thing aside.

"It is an ordeal that will never come to you, little sister," he said with an attempt at a

smile. "A woman does not have to swear blood-fealty with a man to make him keep his troth." The change in his manner was small, but Motrya Petrovna felt it.

"Oh," she said in some confusion, "was I wrong in speaking as I did? Believe me, Ivan, I had no thought to be unkind." She was so appealing in her concern that he could not but have forgiven her had her lapse been really grave.

"There was no fault," he said gently. "It only means that henceforward you will have two brothers instead of one." The girl looked up at him gratefully and flashed a shy glance of interrogation at her newly-declared relative at his side.

"Stepan Dmitrievitch has been very kind to me so far," she said demurely. "I shall be glad if he does not forget me later on." She turned toward him with a friendly nod. "But that is not what I came to ask you, Stepan Dmitrievitch," she said. "Are you going to let me have my flowers?" The man spoken to looked vainly around for a subordinate and took an irresolute step toward the bow.

"I will call some one to bring them up," he

said deferentially, but Ivan Egorovitch did not wait.

"I will get them," he said eagerly, and swung himself over the side. The girl leaned down to him across the bulwark and, steadying himself against the larger craft, he handed up to her the blossoms he had brought. She received them with a little cry of joy, and when he regained the deck, stood with them hugged up in a great heap in her arms, her face bent deep in the fragrant blooms.

"Oh," she cried, "it is good to see them again. I have not had any of my own for weeks."

"I am glad I brought them," said Ivan Egorovitch. "I picked them on the headland while I was waiting for you to come."

"And are there many?" she demanded breathlessly.

"Yes," he answered, "all that your heart can wish." She gave a little sigh of satisfaction and pressed her head again against the flowers.

"I am afraid it is wrong to love them so much," she said doubtfully. "Sometimes I feel as if I could not live without them." She

looked at Ivan Egorovitch with wide eyes as if she expected him to pass judgment on the dereliction.

"Oh, I do not know," he said practically. "It does not seem so bad. Besides, it is not worth while to worry about it here, for before you realize it, the flowers will all be gone and you will not see them again until next year."

"I shall hate the cold, I know," she declared emphatically.

"It is not the cold but the dark that wears on one," he answered. "There is something fairly maddening about the long winter nights."

A boatman came up and spoke to Stepan Dmitrievitch, who had been listening in appreciative silence to all that had been said. He considered for a moment, nodded, and, turning with the man, went reluctantly away.

Ivan Egorovitch and the girl remained alone together, standing at the side. The young man was still upset by the emotions stirred by the unexpected meeting and watched her movements without venturing on speech. The girl waited for some moments and busied herself with her flowers. She felt the silence, however, and grew uneasy under it.

"Why do you look at me like that, Ivan Egorovitch?" she demanded finally. The young man started as if he had been asleep and let his eyes drop to the floor.

"You are two people to me to-day," he said slowly; "the child you were when I saw you last and the older woman whom I have kept in mind through all these years."

"Did you then care so much?" she asked curiously.

"As I cared for my life," he answered with conviction.

"Then why did you go away without telling her so?" she demanded scornfully. "You were not bold for a lover, Ivan Egorovitch, and it was not fair to her."

"I was a fool," he said humbly, "and too easily overborne—but I suffered for it in the end."

"And do you think she did not suffer, too?" she asked.

"Did she then also care?" he said softly. "I have never really known."

"Yes," replied the girl, "though I have no right to tell it. She did care and she was never quite the same after that."

"I should have stayed," he said moodily. "I know it well enough now!"

"Yes," she said softly, "you should have stayed." He gave himself up to the bitter recollection and she did not try to interrupt his thoughts. Yet when he spoke again it was only to touch the subject on another side.

"Varenka—" he said hesitatingly, "has she changed much in looks?" The girl thought for a moment with her head turned to one side.

"No, not very much," she said musingly. "She is older, of course, and less slender, but otherwise she is much the same."

"I wish the change were greater," he said gloomily. "It would be easier for me when we meet." Motrya Petrovna misunderstood him and disliked the implication in his words.

"Do not forget that she is married now," she said with some intensity, "and, further, if she were not, you may be sure she would never show you that she had cared. But what is it to you, anyway?" she demanded. "Surely by this time you have found some other in her place." The young man smiled down at her and shook his head.

"No," he said, "I did not mean it in that

way. But so far there has been no one else. I have kept away from women—and besides, there are few girls in this country for any one to have. There will be more than one man here, little sister, who will be glad to see your face; and with the memories I have of it, if I see you daily, I am not sure but I shall fall in love with you myself." Motrya Petrovna's eyes danced and she made him a low bow.

"How kind you are!" she exclaimed derisively. "You were an excellent brother when I was a little girl, but from what I have seen of you as a lover I am afraid I should be somewhat doubtful about selecting you for myself."

The young man's face flushed and he was plainly moved to make a vigorous reply.

"I was only a boy then," he said abruptly, but got no further in his defense. As he spoke, Stepan Dmitrievitch came back to where they stood and, with him present at the telling, Ivan Egorovitch felt the sentimental protest die within his throat. Stepan Dmitrievitch was full of impatience at the delay.

"It has been an hour, Ivan," he announced. "Do you not think it would be safe now to go in?" The boat had come quite close to the

channel's mouth and on the right the rocky headland loomed up vaguely in the fog. Ivan Egorovitch bent forward and peered intently into the mist, but the gray cloud was too thick for vision and he could not decide on the matter as he wished. The girl watched the two men in eager silence.

"Shall we soon be there?" she asked.

"It will be no time at all," said Stepan Dmitrievitch, "when once we pass the draw."

"My father was asleep when you came," continued Motrya Petrovna, "and I do not think he knows that you are here. I will go and tell him, and get the things ready so there will be no delay."

She left them with a little nod to both and they watched her go away without a word. Then Stepan Dmitrievitch turned to his companion and laid a hand upon his arm.

"Was it her sister?" he asked, speaking low, as if afraid some one else would hear. Ivan Egorovitch nodded without saying a word.

"And did the other one look then as this one does now?"

"So close that, as you saw, when I met her to-day I thought they were the same." Stepan

Dmitrievitch breathed out hard and clapped Ivan Egorovitch smartly on the back.

"I do not blame you," he cried. "She was worth it. I should have been in love with her myself." Ivan Egorovitch laughed and gave his shoulders a sarcastic shrug.

"Be careful that you do not fall in love with this one now," he said and made ready to go down into his boat. "This fog is too thick to see through," he added briskly. "I will go ashore and walk along to where I can see the draw."

He was down almost as he spoke and pulling swiftly toward the land. Once or twice he looked back, but it was at the stern of the *bidarka* rather than at the point where Stepan Dmitrievitch stood. He pulled more slowly as he reached the cove, and when the bow of his boat slid up on the tiny beach, he sat for a full moment thinking, before he took up the rope to make it fast.

As he stooped to lift it, he came upon a spray of the blossoms that had been left behind when he had given the others to the girl, and he paused again, taking the branch up curiously in his hand. He looked it over from end to end with the same twinkle in his eye, and finally,

opening his thumb and forefinger, dropped it over into the sea.

"You will not have to wait," he said whimsically. "I shall not need you to make choice. God willing, she is going to be white!"

CHAPTER III

THE PRIEST'S SON

Stepan Dmitrievitch stood waiting for Ivan Egorovitch as he came again over the side of the boat. He was not alone, for close behind him stood a slender, undersized person, who kept his eyes fixed on the coming man and showed by his manner that he only waited for him to be well on the deck before accosting him.

The man's face was long, even without his thin, straggling beard, and he was more than usually narrow between the eyes. His head hung forward on his neck and his shoulders had the sanctimonious droop that marks the cleric. So well did he look his trade that, without his hat and high, close-buttoned habit, Ivan Egorovitch would easily have known him for the priest. Stepan Dmitrievitch spoke at once.

"Well," he said, "is it right yet so we can go in?" Ivan Egorovitch nodded assuringly.

"It is near the end," he said confidently. "Go

slowly and I think that you need have no fear."

Stepan Dmitrievitch turned to give the necessary commands, but was interrupted by the priest, who pushed forward and took him by the arm.

"Is this the man?" he asked eagerly. Stepan Dmitrievitch flashed an apologetic look at Ivan Egorovitch before he spoke.

"Yes," he said laconically, "this is the man." Then, as the priest waited, he turned again to Ivan Egorovitch and said with a note of deprecation in his voice:

"This is Simeon Gvosdef, the father of Moïssei. You will remember that I spoke to you of him when you first came on the boat." He was ill at ease and, having spoken, backed away as if to leave Ivan Egorovitch with the man he had introduced. The priest waited no further advances, but moved at once close to the young man and smilingly put out his hand. Ivan Egorovitch evaded the contact and edged hastily away in the direction Stepan Dmitrievitch had gone.

"I will talk to you in a moment," he said, as he passed by him. "I must speak to Stepan

Dmitrievitch before he goes away." He hastened after his blood-brother and brought him rudely to a stop.

"What foolishness is this?" he demanded irritably. "Have you not told him?" Stepan Dmitrievitch drew in his under lip between his teeth and shamefacedly shook his head. Ivan Egorovitch remained looking at him in silence while his indignation grew.

"I do not blame you so much for not telling him yourself," he said ruefully, "but why have you put the burden on me?" Stepan Dmitrievitch threw up his hands in a gesture of appeal.

"It was he who decided it, not I," he said helplessly. "He knew that you came from the shore and was only biding his time."

"Well, I do not want to tell him any more than you do."

"You must. It will be kinder than to let him wait." Ivan Egorovitch clung to him irresolutely.

"Stay with me till it is done," he urged, but Stepan Dmitrievitch would not hear.

"I could not do it," he said soberly. "He has talked so much with me about the boy

while we were on the way." They stood for a moment in embarrassed silence, looking down at the deck and avoiding each other's eyes. Then Stepan Dmitrievitch recovered himself and drew quietly away.

"I must go now," he said gently. "I wish I could help you further, but I must give the orders to the men." Ivan Egorovitch shrugged his shoulders but did not raise his eyes, and Stepan Dmitrievitch continued on his way with the same apologetic, half-guilty tread.

The priest, meanwhile, stood where he had been left, watching with impatient eyes the colloquy between the two men. When Ivan Egorovitch came back to him his face brightened and he nervously clasped his hands.

"You will pardon me," he said, with the slight, fawning cringe that seemed a habit of the man, "but they tell me you are come from the station of the *promyshleniki* at Ltua—that it is just over there." He unclasped his hands and waved one vaguely in the direction of the shore. Ivan Egorovitch, with his eyes fixed on his interlocutor as if in fascination, silently nodded an assent.

"I have a son," went on the priest softly.

"He has been with the *promyshleniki* for four years—and even a longer time away from home. It has been said that he was with the hunters at Ltua and I am making bold to ask you if he is still at that place." Ivan Egorovitch temporized as he could.

"You mean Moissei Gvosdef?" he asked feebly. The priest's face broke into a smile and his restless hands clasped and unclasped impulsively.

"Ah, you know him!" he cried joyously. "You have seen him day by day! Then it is true he is at the post, and I shall see him." He turned in the direction of the shore, leaning forward in his excitement and straining into the fog, as if by his insistence he could overcome the obstacles that intervened between him and his desire. Ivan Egorovitch saw no road open that would lead him to the truth, and a sudden wave of anger toward Stepan Dmitrievitch swept over him as he thought how unnecessarily this disagreeable duty had been thrust upon him.

"He has been there eight months," he said with an effort, "and was there when I came away. You will see him if we get in before

night." Simeon Gvosdef gave a little sigh of content and continued the inquiry that was near his heart.

"Is he well?" he inquired abruptly, turning his nervous eyes again on the young man. Ivan Egorovitch felt his heart go down and, try as he might, no fitting answer came. The priest watched him in silence that after a little grew into alarm.

"What is it?" he cried sharply. "What is it you have not told?" His timidity fell away from him in his excitement and, coming close to Ivan Egorovitch, he seized him convulsively by the wrist. "Tell me!" he demanded almost fiercely, "in what way has he come to harm?" Ivan Egorovitch drew back hastily and strove to pull himself away.

"Let me go!" he cried threateningly. "I had no hand in it at all!"

The priest's grasp tightened more firmly as his conviction lent him strength.

"Then there is harm!" he burst out, his voice rising higher as he spoke. "You know of it, but you do not wish to tell!"

"Well, take it then, if you will have it!" cried the young man angrily. "I only know that he

was away for a week with the others preparing the ground for the new traps, and when the men came in last night they said he was dead."

For an instant the priest's fierce grip persisted and he stood looking breathlessly into Ivan Egorovitch's face. Then the light went out of his eyes and the clasp fell suddenly away.

"Dead?" he repeated in an incredulous whisper. "Dead!" His face began to twitch convulsively with the strength of his emotion and he turned abruptly away. As if the power of sight had suddenly gone from him, he put out his hands before him and groped his way dizzily to the rail. There he stood rigid, with bent head and back, gazing fixedly out into the mist.

"Moissei!" he cried almost fiercely. "Moissei!" and his voice was bitter with the reflection of his grief. For a long time he stood motionless, bound by the first shock of his loss. Then the reaction came, his shoulders began to rise and fall and Ivan Egorovitch could hear the smothered intake of his sobs. Suddenly he turned and came back to the young man.

"Tell me," he demanded brokenly, "that it is not true! You promised me that I should see

him at the post to-night." Ivan Egorovitch's eyes filled and he sorrowfully shook his head.

"You will see him," he said gently. "The men brought in his body and he will not be buried until to-day at dusk." The priest's hands came convulsively together and he strove to steady his voice.

"I must! I must!" he whispered. "God would not will it that he should lose the blessing at the end." He shivered slightly and steadied himself against a convenient bale. Then, as if the weakness that had fallen on him were mere physical fatigue, he added wearily: "Oh, I have come so far!"

Ivan Egorovitch found no words to comfort him, but his hands went out in readiness to catch the man if he should fall. The priest held his place, however, and unconsciously drew away from the proffered aid. When he spoke again, it was in pursuance of a new idea.

"How did death come?" he demanded abruptly. "Was it from God or man?" Ivan Egorovitch was startled by the suddenness of the inquiry and found no fitting answer.

"I do not know," he answered, but the suspicion at his heart rose up and looked out

through his eyes, and Simeon Gvosdef saw it there and understood. He came closer to the young man, pushing out his head until their faces almost touched, and Ivan Egorovitch could feel his hurried breath upon his cheek.

"Who was it did it?" he demanded fiercely. "Tell me! I have a right to know!" Ivan Egorovitch pushed him hastily away

"I did not say any one did it," he answered.

"But you believe—"

"Never mind what I believe. I should be a fool to make an accusation where I do not fully know. I have made no accusation, and I make none! If you are not satisfied, talk with Mikhail Etolin, the lieutenant, when you get ashore." He turned on his heel and would have gone away, but the other seized him by the arm.

"So be it!" he cried, between his clenched teeth. "If I must, I will wait my turn. But, as God is good, if my boy was killed, I will bring the matter to the light! And if it was foully done, I will have judgment if it fall upon the lieutenant himself!" As he finished, he dropped the arm that he had held and left Ivan Egorovitch free. His excitement overcame the

weakness that had held him bound and, with a pathetic attempt at dignity, he moved unsteadily away and went forward to his place among the men.

Ivan Egorovitch watched him ruefully till he was out of sight and then looked about to see where he should go. The merchandise piled up along the central shut-in space hid from him the exact position of the people at the stern; but from that direction there floated to him, now that he had time to listen for it, the sound of a girl's voice, singing.

He picked his way along the cluttered passage to the open after-space and, coming on its occupants, saw that it was Motrya Petrovna who was lifting up her voice.

She sat with her back to a stanchion wound about with a great rope, and was busy in an attempt to occupy and amuse a vigorous, well-grown infant that lay in her spread lap. She was giving absorbed attention to the process, with somewhat qualified success, bending forward over her charge and swaying her body from side to side so that the light glinted on her black hair as she moved. Her flowers lay in a heap beside her on the deck.

Near-by, on a pile of baggage, sat a sickly, middle-aged man in a long blue nankeen coat, the skirts of which he had drawn up over his knees to keep them from contact with the deck. He had a square, stubborn jaw, and large, restless gray eyes, that roamed continually from place to place. His arms were held straight along on either side of him, the hands pushing against the seat as if to support his weight, and he sat stiffly upright with an air of general discontent. He talked continuously, but evidently for his own satisfaction, rather than with an idea of conversation with the girl, for Motrya Petrovna responded but occasionally to what he said.

"There were seven, Motrya, I am sure of it," he was saying fretfully. "And now I can find only six. It must be that one was taken forward by the men or else was lost overboard carelessly in the night. I have looked everywhere that they would let me there below, and I shall have the boat searched vigorously—do you hear me?—vigorously, before we go ashore!" The girl continued her attentions to the baby and swung it gently from side to side.

"I saw only six," she said without look-

ing up. "I do not believe you brought any more than that from Yakutat." The man's jaws came together with a snap and he looked down stubbornly at the pile of things on which he sat.

"I know I can not be mistaken," he repeated sullenly. "There were the two rolls of bedding, the laurel chest, the long leathern sack, the bucket of brandy, the clothes-pouch, and—and one other package that is not here. It is singular I can not remember what it was." The girl yawned slowly as she dandled the baby up and down.

"That is because there never was a seventh," she answered wearily. "When the boat brings the rest of the things from Yakutat, you will find that all have come."

"I shall not," he declared angrily. "There were seven came with us and I shall have a search." The baby cried and the girl lifted it up and, placing it against her shoulder, began to pat it on the back. In so doing, she looked up and saw Ivan Egorovitch, and he came immediately to where she sat. She gave him a cheery nod of recognition and turned to the man at her side.

"Father," she said, "here is Ivan Nilof. You will remember him at home. Is it not good to see a familiar face out here in this strange land?" Whatever of joy Peter Gagarin felt at this sudden recognition, it was not reflected in his face.

He did not rise, or change his position, but fixed his big eyes suspiciously on Ivan Egorovitch and looked him swiftly up and down.

"I remember him," he said dryly, and then, as if ashamed of his churlishness, he put out his hand. The young man flushed and hesitated, but a glance from the girl decided him, and he took the proffered grasp as cordially as if it had been offered in full heart.

"You are almost at your journey's end, Peter Efimovitch," he said pleasantly. "I am glad to be the first to bring you welcome to the place." Peter Gagarin sniffed ungraciously and fell back on the grievance that occupied his mind.

"The place is a small matter if I can find my things," he complained childishly. "When I started I had seven parcels in my effects and now there are only six."

"O father," said the girl, "be patient! Why

can not you wait and see?" She blushed in her embarrassment and leaned forward to lay a pleading hand upon his arm. But the child had reached the furthest limit of its patience and refused to brook even this temporary interruption of her ministrations to itself. It straightened to its full length, threw back its head and gave voice to its protest in a prolonged and vigorous wail. Motrya Petrovna returned promptly to its aid.

"O, Grinya, be good!" she cried coaxingly, and gathered him closely in her arms. She applied again the small arts that had comforted him before and hummed to him and joggled him, while the young man watched. Then, as her efforts failed to bring success, she turned her head and began to look anxiously toward the cabin door.

"Tatiana!" she called briskly. "Tatiana Vassilievna! The baby is crying and I think you had better come."

"I'm coming," responded a voice from the space within, and almost on the word the owner of it came out through the doorway. She was a short, stout woman, with an extremely red face. Her features were coarse and heavy and

the skin on her cheeks was shiny as if it had been scoured. Her eyebrows were bushy as a man's above her tip-tilted nose. She had a green handkerchief tied around her head, the knot under her chin serving to fill up and make wider her wide, fat neck, and she carried in her arms a great bundle of clothing which she had evidently been gathering against the going from the boat. Depositing it hastily on a pile of like baggage on one side, she hurried to Motrya Petrovna, making a crooning noise with her closed lips and opening her bodice with an instinctive maternal movement as she came.

"Give him to me," she said, and lifting the child she backed away with it for some paces, choosing her place by a glance over her shoulder, and dropped down behind a pile of boxes where the others could see nothing of her but her head. For an instant there was an increase in the vigor of the child's impatient note, and then the outcry broke suddenly in the middle with a gurgle and a sigh. The mother bent above him busily for a moment and then smilingly raised her head.

"Are we nearly there?" she asked with a touch of interest. "I see that we are under

way.'' Her eyes fixed themselves on Ivan Egorovitch rather than the others, and Motrya Petrovna spoke at once.

''This is Ivan Nilof, Tatiana, the man who came in the boat. He says we are near the post.'' Then, turning to the young man, she added in a lower tone: ''Tatiana Vassilievna is Zakar Medvedef's wife, in whose charge I told you I had come.'' Tatiana Vassilievna looked round her curiously in the fog.

''Well,'' she said emphatically, ''I hope he is taking us to something we shall like. I haven't seen air as thick as this since the Fridays when I was laundry-maid at home.'' The girl smiled at Ivan Egorovitch and said to him under her breath,

''I could tell her there will at least be flowers.'' He nodded affirmation and she spoke again openly to Zakar Medvedef's wife.

''It is so warm that it surely must be nice where there is no fog,'' she said. Ivan Egorovitch was pleased with her defense of the unknown land and answered her with zest.

''Yes, but it will not last as long as I could wish. It is only a fortnight till Elijah's Day, and after that there is sure to be a change.''

"Shall we have houses?" asked Tatiana Vassilievna, "or where shall we live?"

"Why, certainly, and warm ones, only they are somewhat small. I know of no house at the post that has more than two rooms." Tatiana Vassilievna threw back her head and laughed aloud.

"Oh, that is nothing," she cried. "It is easier to find the children when we are all together in a heap." The young man's eyes danced in sympathy.

"I know how that is," he said. "I was one of a family of fourteen." Tatiana Vassilievna's wide mouth opened and she looked at him aghast.

"Fourteen!" she exclaimed. "God remembered your father certainly, young man. Were many of them girls?"

"No, only two."

"Ha, that was good!" said the woman, breathing out in her content. "Boys are like horses. They can go to their market as they are. But with girls, it is hard to get rid of them without a harness that is good."

"Were you all ready, Tatiana," interposed Motrya Petrovna, "when I called you to come

out?" The baby was now asleep and Tatiana Vassilievna, moving carefully so as not to waken it, came around again to where the others sat.

"Ready to a shoe-string," she insisted. "My first and last bundles are together in that pile."

"I wish ours were," spoke up Peter Efimovitch sulkily. "We, too, would be ready if we could find the one bundle that is lost. I have asked everybody in the boat about it, too," he added gloomily. Tatiana Vassilievna looked at him in cheerful scorn.

"I haven't a doubt of it, Peter Efimovitch," she returned breezily. "And most of us have heard you more than once. The world may saddle other faults upon you, but no one will ever lay the sin of silence at your door."

Out of the mist on the right hand loomed suddenly a rocky point covered from base to top with stately trees.

"See!" cried Ivan Egorovitch excitedly. "It is the island in the bay. When we have passed it, we are almost there." He rose to his feet and shouted a long, quavering call. After a moment it was answered from the shore, and Ivan Egorovitch turned to his companions with a beaming face.

"You hear?" he said. "They are waiting for us just ahead." Stepan Dmitrievitch, hearing the call, came back to where they stood and he and Ivan Egorovitch returned together to the bow. There were ten minutes more of waiting and then the boat slowed gently to a stop. A sudden stir of oars and voices broke out around them and small boats appeared on either side. The two men came back and Stepan Dmitrievitch demanded cheerily:

"Well, are you ready now to go ashore?"

"Shall I take the baby, Tatiana?" asked Motrya Petrovna. "You will need both your hands to look after the unloading of your things." Tatiana Vassilievna protested feebly, but finally allowed the girl to have her way.

"But how will you manage your own things?" she objected. "Your father can not be depended on, you know." Both Ivan Egorovitch and Stepan Dmitrievitch stepped promptly forward.

"We will attend to that," said both as if in one voice, and Ivan Egorovitch added: "Where are the things you want?" The girl nodded toward the pile on which her father had been seated.

"The clothes-pouch is about the only thing I shall need at once," she said. "The others can wait till later if you like." Both men plunged forward and reached for the designated pouch. Ivan Egorovitch pulled it from the pile and pushed back Stepan Dmitrievitch's officious hand.

"That is all right, Stepan," he said dryly. "You help the other woman. I can attend to this." But Stepan Dmitrievitch did not seem to hear him and took hold of the other end. Motrya Petrovna watched them with amusement in her eyes.

"Let Stepan Dmitrievitch take it, Ivan," she said. "He can put it on the boat." Ivan Egorovitch flushed and, letting go the handle, stood angrily aside. Stepan Dmitrievitch shouldered the piece of baggage triumphantly and moved off with it to the rail. Motrya Petrovna waited and then beckoned Ivan Egorovitch to come near.

"Are you not ashamed?" she said. "It was not worth it. I know you better than I do him, and I thought I should need some one to help me with the baby down into the boat."

CHAPTER IV

THE PRIEST'S SON IS BURIED

The women had been settled in safety in the boat that was to take them to the shore, and Ivan Egorovitch was himself preparing to descend into it, when he felt a detaining touch on his arm. He looked around and saw that it was Simeon Gvosdef, who had come behind him unnoticed in the stir. The priest's eyes were red with weeping and his insignificant features twitched restlessly in spite of his efforts to maintain his calm.

"Where is he?" he said hoarsely. "Where shall I find him when I get ashore?" Ivan Egorovitch was touched by his distress and sought to comfort him.

"He was in his own cabin when I came away," he answered. "They put him there when they first brought him in." He felt from the manner of the priest that this was not all he wished to know, so he continued: "Altogether, there

are so few houses in the place that there is little danger of mistake; but, if you like, you can come with me. My lodging is just across the way from his and I will pilot you." The priest's shifty eyes came gratefully up to Ivan Egorovitch's face and as quickly dropped away again.

"But you are going now," he said uncertainly, "and I shall have to wait."

"I shall be detained at the landing for a time and you can easily find me."

"You are very good to me," said the other humbly, and gave back from the rail. Ivan Egorovitch lost no further time, but swung himself nimbly down into the boat. He found his place by Motrya Petrovna, but his mind was full of what had just occurred, and, without speaking, he sat gazing absently out into the mist. Motrya Petrovna noticed it and let her curiosity crystallize into words.

"What is it, Ivan?" she said softly. "Is our coming so sad a thing that it has taken away your power of speech?" He heard her and turned promptly toward her, but it was a full moment before her meaning filtered through his preoccupation so that he understood what she

had said. Then his face lighted responsively and he smilingly shook his head.

"It was not my own worries that kept me still," he said in quick apology. "I have never had a happier home-coming in my life. If anything, it was Simeon Gvosdef's troubles that put a damper on my thought."

"Simeon Gvosdef?" she repeated. "What has he done to you that should make you sad?"

"Nothing, of himself. His son at the post was killed, and it fell to me to bring him the evil news." Motrya Petrovna crossed herself almost unconsciously and drew her brows together in a frown.

"It was enough!" she said with ready sympathy. "I had not heard of it before. But, now that it is done and finished, why are you still disturbed?"

"Because it is not finished. I was thinking of what is coming for me—and him—after we get ashore."

"Oh," said the girl understandingly, and relapsed into silence in her turn. He was satisfied not to disturb her, knowing that she was a sharer in his thought, and it was Motrya Petrovna who was the first to speak again.

"Be good to him, Ivan," she said coaxingly. "He is different from the others, but he is an old man and alone and I can not bear to think of his having trouble for lack of a friendly deed." Her voice was tremulous and, looking suddenly at her, he saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

"I will," he said, and felt his own eyes cloud. The shadow of the priest's grief stayed with them and they were both quiet for the remainder of the way. With Motrya Petrovna it was simply a natural girlish sympathy that went out impulsively to one in need. But with Ivan Egorovitch their common depression of spirits seemed not alone the expression of a vicarious tenderness, but a bond that held him for the moment delightfully within the pale of her maidenly reserve.

Mikhail Etolin met them at the water's edge.

"What is this?" he said fretfully. "Are there women, too?" He held in his hand the open letter which had brought him the news of the enlargement of the post, and it was easy to see that his sense of his own importance had not thereby grown less. Ivan Egorovitch saw it and paid his tribute to it with a smile.

"Congratulations, your Well-born, on your increased estate," he said with a low bow. "I trust there is enough brandy left in the government tubs that all of us can drink to your good fortune." Mikhail Etolin's fat face wrinkled in acknowledgment of the compliment, but he raised a warning finger as he made reply.

"Time enough later, my boy, to think of that," he returned ponderously. "Just now, I want to know what you expect me to do with these women you have brought?" Ivan Egorovitch's eyes twinkled.

"I had thought of your house," he said innocently. "It is the most comfortable of the lot." Mikhail Etolin's little eyes grew narrower and he looked suspiciously at the young man.

"I believe the one you are in will do well enough," he said dryly. "You can carry your things across to the house that little Gvosdef occupied and leave the other place to them. The men I can quarter in the warehouse sheds."

Ivan Egorovitch shrugged his shoulders and grinned somewhat ruefully at the unexpected turning of his joke.

"All right," he said. "But have they taken Moissei Simeonovitch away?"

"No, but they will before you need the place to-night." The young man saw the chance to reach the lieutenant in turn.

"I am glad he is still there," he said with assumed frankness. "His father will see him then before he is put underground."

Mikhail Etolin woke slowly to an understanding of the words, and stood blinking his little eyes.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Nothing, except that his father is aboard there on the boat and was afraid that you would hold the funeral before he got ashore. He is the priest sent out by the company for the larger post." The lieutenant was visibly startled by the news.

"He would have been right in his fear if I had known that he was there," he said hastily. His face darkened and he looked ominously at the young man.

"Why did not you tell me this at once?" he demanded. "Where is he now?"

"How could I sooner? This is the first time I have been ashore. The priest, though, is on the boat, still waiting for his turn."

"How do you know?"

"Because he is to come to me here for direction as soon as he gets away." Mikhail Etolin breathed more easily and was visibly relieved.

"That is better," he grunted. "I can scarcely get the thing over before they fetch him off, but it will not be like having him come upon us unprepared. Akh!" he burst out suddenly, "the One God knows that with the death of that vermin I had hoped that the company would be able to cry quittance of the breed!"

He looked about him and beckoned with his hand. A man, at work about the luggage, left it and came to where he stood. He talked with him for a moment and the man saluted and went rapidly away. The lieutenant turned to Ivan Egorovitch for a final word.

"Wait without fail for the priest," he said, "and it will be well if you can hold him here till Luka Odintzof's return."

The waiting was not for long. The priest made spur of his anxiety to hasten his desire and the women were scarcely arranged for and sent on, when he appeared on the beach and made his way eagerly to where Ivan Egorovitch stood. Behind him came Peter Efimovitch, carrying a leathern roll bound tightly round with

strips of twisted cloth. He held the bundle closely to his breast and there was an air of general elation in the way he looked around.

"I have found it," he said with dignity as he passed Ivan Egorovitch. "Simeon Gvosdef had thoughtlessly covered it with his things. I knew I could not be mistaken when I said there were seven." He walked on without waiting for an answer and Ivan Egorovitch turned unwillingly to the priest.

"You will have to wait," he said with an effort. "I can not go till the man comes back who has charge of this pile of things."

He bent above the luggage to hide his telltale flush and moved the pieces busily from side to side. The priest, however, scarcely seemed to hear and showed no interest in what he did. His lifelong habit of humility dominated even the impatience of his grief and he set down his bag and stood listlessly by, betraying neither by word nor look his heart-sick eagerness to be on the road. He seemed totally unconscious of the stir and movement round him and waited dejectedly and in silence, without moving from his place.

Ivan Egorovitch, as he worked, watched him

covertly and found it hard to make the pretense that would fill the lagging moments as they passed. When Luka Odintzof returned, he ran to meet him and came back with him to the place.

"Is it arranged?" he whispered.

"Yes," said the man, "they have done what they could and I was to tell you that you should let him come." Ivan Egorovitch gave a great sigh of relief and spoke immediately to the priest.

"This man will take my place," he said. "If you are ready, come." Simeon Gvosdef gathered himself eagerly and took up his bag. Ivan Egorovitch timed his pace to the handicap of his companion's burden and began at once to climb the hill.

The little group of houses that made up the post were set irregularly on the sloping crest of the first level above the sea. There was none of any size, except the long warehouse built of split logs, and it was the only one with a stockade. The various dwellings stood around in the cramped clearing without particular plan, low and squat, a single story high. Two stood together, a little apart from the rest, and it was

at the door of one of these that Ivan Egorovitch stopped.

"This is the place," he said soberly, and crossed himself as he thought of the dead man lying within. "Go in as you will. If you need me further, you will find me at the house across the way."

The priest eased down his burden and leaned it against the door. For an agonized instant he stood with his hands pressed together as if to gain courage for the task. Then with a sob he went swiftly forward and disappeared into the house. Ivan Egorovitch waited till he was fully out of sight and then went slowly across to the house he had pointed out. Motrya Petrovna was standing in the doorway.

"Is that where Simeon Gvosdef is to find his son?" she asked, gazing across at the open door with the fascinated curiosity, that the place where death is awakens inevitably in the young.

"Do not look at it," he answered, pushing her back from the open space. "Come, let us go inside." She yielded to his mood and they entered without further word. But the girl's thoughts were busy with the tragedy against

which her skirts had brushed and she could not get it from her mind.

"O Tatiana," she cried excitedly, "the dead man is in that house across the way! His father has just gone in!" Tatiana Vassilievna raised her eyes meditatively from the clothes which she was sorting and gazed out through the open door.

"Poor fellow!" she said commiseratingly. "We all step off, one after the other, but that does not make it easier when one sees the others go. Will there be a funeral, do you think?"

"I suppose so—now," said the young man. "His father is a priest. Still, it can not be rightly done," he added, "for there is no church nor deacon, and not even a two-kopeck candle in the place."

"Still, it will be a funeral," said Tatiana with a sigh of content. "There were such beautiful funerals at Kirsanov. One could weep and weep, and I always stayed till the *Eternal Memory* was sung." Motrya Petrovna leaned forward and looked fixedly at the other house.

"Ivan," she said, "Simeon Gvosdef is coming out and I believe he is coming here."

The young man assured himself of the truth

of what she said and went quietly to the door. Simeon Gvosdef met him there and seized him with both hands. He was speechless with emotion and his breath came in great gasps.

"My boy!" he cried when he could force himself to talk. "They will not let me see my boy!" He clung to Ivan Egorovitch with unreasoning frenzy and shook him to add force to what he said. "Where is the lieutenant?" he managed to get out. "Take me to him at once!" Ivan Egorovitch guessed shrewdly what had happened and wasted no time in unnecessary words.

"Come," he said, and led the way across the open space. The priest pressed closely at his elbow, but made no more complaint, and they went swiftly and without speech back by the storing-sheds and up to the house at the edge of the little plain in which Mikhail Etolin lived.

It was getting toward six o'clock and the lieutenant sat on a cushioned bench before his door, resting himself while he awaited the summons to his evening meal. His coat was off and his linen sack was open at the throat. He had a fan in one hand and in the other a half-filled bowl of tea.

He rose inquiringly as the two approached and carefully set down his cup. Then, as if suddenly recognizing his visitors, he came cumbrously forward a pace or two.

"This is the priest, I suppose," he said in his wheezy voice, and reverently put out his hand. Moved unconsciously by habit, Simeon Gvosdef reached out his hand to touch him and gave him mechanically the blessing he had asked. The lieutenant drew out a bench and motioned his visitors to sit down.

"You will take some tea with me, of course," he said, and turning, called through the open door, "Mitry, fill up the samovar and bring us two more cups." Simeon Gvosdef refused the proffered drink, though the unexpected friendliness of the lieutenant embarrassed him so that he stood for a moment uncertain where to begin. But as the sense of his wrongs came back to him, he found no lack of words.

"You are commander here," he said. "Why is it you will not let me see my son?"

Mikhail Etolin had evidently foreseen this interview and question and had determined beforehand how they should be met. His little eyes blinked blankly at his interlocutor and his

lips parted in a smile of polite surprise and interrogation.

"What is this?" he demanded. "You have a son here at the post?" He looked at Ivan Egorovitch rather than at the priest and the young man felt he was expected to reply.

"It is Moissei Gvosdef, your Well-born," he said in a low voice. He was not a good actor and it was plain he was not at ease. Mikhail Etolin's mouth opened and his face lighted as if in sudden comprehension, and he began mournfully to shake his head.

"Akh! that is bad," he said in a whisper. "But surely he is not buried yet?"

"No, but they will not let me see him."

"Not see him!"

"No, I was told it was not allowed."

"This must be looked into," said the lieutenant with a show of astonishment. "What reason did they give for not letting you go in?"

"They did not prevent me from going in; but the boy has been bound in cloth and sewed so I could not see even his face!"

"Oh!" said the lieutenant, as if with new understanding. "I thought they had shut you from the house."

Simeon Gvosdef shook his head. Then, with a fierceness that was almost accusation, he faced the lieutenant and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"How was it that he died?" he demanded harshly. Ivan Egorovitch's heart stood still and he awaited breathlessly what the lieutenant would say. His conscience could not but be shocked at the deceit in which he had a part, but in spite of that there stirred in him a thrill of admiration for the skill and coolness the lieutenant displayed. The fat man met the priest's question frankly. His manner waived graciously the accusation it implied and showed in itself only the desire to be kind.

"He was crushed by a tree which fell on him as he worked," he said simply. "As to the cloth, it was a necessary thing. I could not leave him out there where it happened, without a service or a word of prayer, if only that I wanted him to be satisfied and stay away when once we had put him underground. There was the sun to fight, and the flies, and it was a long way to come. To cover him with a cloth and keep it moist seemed the only way to manage while we brought him in."

His manner was so plausible and he mingled fact and fancy so skilfully in what he said, that if Ivan Egorovitch had not known that the concealment of the body was but lately done, he could have believed in the explanation himself. The priest was bewildered, but not yet convinced. The cunning excuse cut out the props on which his suspicion had been built, but his heart still cried out unreasoningly against his son's death as a wrong. He received the explanation in dogged silence, turning the matter over confusedly in his mind.

"Then why did they refuse to let me see him?" he demanded resentfully. Mikhail Etolin drew up his shoulders and threw out his hands.

"Because they were fools!" he said shortly. "I can see no reason beyond that it made them extra trouble and was unusual to be asked." The priest clasped his hands together and broke into excited speech.

"Then I may see him once again?" he cried entreatingly. "At least you will let me see his face!" Mikhail Etolin drew down his eyebrows thoughtfully and half shook his head.

"It would be better not," he urged. "He

has been dead too long to be good to see. But if you can not do without—"

"Oh, I must! I must!" broke in Simeon Gvosdef eagerly.

"Very well, then," said the lieutenant, "I will see what can be done." He called for his coat and struggled into it and, putting on his hat, set out at once to put his promise into deed. Ivan Egorovitch followed silently behind.

"About the service, father," said Mikhail Etolin as they walked. "We have no church and for you to do it will be hard. But there is no other priest and if you do not, I shall have to read." The priest nodded understandingly and drew his hand up to his throat.

"I will do it," he said tremulously, yet decidedly. "He shall have all that I can do to rest his soul."

"You have your robes?"

"They are in my bundle at the house."

"Very well. Make yourself ready. It lacks but half an hour to the time that has been set."

They relapsed into silence and so continued until the two houses had again been reached. Ivan Egorovitch turned aside to the one where he lived. The others, without noticing his de-

fection, proceeded on their way and entered together into the other house.

It was half an hour later that Ivan Egorovitch, accompanied by the two women, came out and went across to the house where the services were to be held. Tatiana Vassilievna carried her baby, holding her handkerchief above its eyes to shelter it from the sun. The room where the body lay was low and square and had such diminutive windows that it was dark even in the day. An altar had been improvised from a table set below the holy picture at the farther end, and on it were the book for the service and seven generous candles taken from Simeon Gvosdef's private store. The flickering yellow flames of these helped much to make things visible in the room and sent dancing shadows all across the walls. A pot with incense smoldered at one side and the heavy vapor from it struggled bravely with the vague odor of mortality that filled the place.

The score of men who made the population of the post stood here and there in subdued rustling groups and whispered idly as they waited for the service to begin. The priest was not in the room, but Mikhail Etolin sat listlessly on a

bench near the altar, his puffy hands clasped aimlessly in his lap.

The body of the boy, still wrapped in its cerements of cloth, was set with its head to the altar, and the loosened flap across the face revealed that the priest's persistence had won its way. There was nothing, however, to show that he had read the truth from the dead man's face, and Ivan Egorovitch sat quietly down by Motrya Petrovna and fell to waiting like the rest.

The room grew absolutely still, except as some person among the lookers-on shifted a foot or punctuated his impatience with a deep, sighing breath. The sunlight from the western window stretched a bar of white through the thick air to a bright circle on the wall beyond. Mikhail Etolin's great body rose and fell placidly as he breathed. The baby made low, contented noises as it lay in its mother's lap, and Tatiana Vassilievna, responding to the stimulus of the time and place, threw up her head and leaned contentedly back, prepared to experience to the full her coming thrills of grief.

The silence grew oppressive and Mikhail

Etolin, awaking from his lethargy, roused up and looked impatiently at the inner door. Finally, from beyond it, there came the noise as of a bench pushed back, a scraping as of footsteps, then the door opened, and Simeon Gvosdef came hurriedly into the room.

His face was very pale, and he looked neither to the right nor to the left. In one hand he held a slip of folded paper and in the other carried a small, pointed knife. He was in his full robes and the people in the room roused themselves in expectation of his beginning the service they had come to hear. His mind seemed bent on something else, however, for, without a word, he went swiftly to where the body lay and with his knife began cutting at the stitches that held the canvas together at the side. He bent above the body and worked with eager haste, but his hands trembled as if he had a palsy and he did not seem to see clearly that which he essayed.

Mikhial Etolin watched him with astonishment for a moment and then rose up and went quickly to his side.

"What are you doing?" he demanded roughly, and seized him by the arm. "Why do you not

begin?'' Simeon Gvosdef struggled vainly for a moment and then passively allowed himself to be pushed away. He lifted to Mikhail Etolin a face distorted by the frenzy of his emotion, and fixed on him his fiercely accusing eyes.

''It is his passport!'' he cried, holding up the strip of paper he had brought. ''I have written it and it is my right to place it in his hand.'' It was a clever stroke and the lieutenant, taken unawares, let go his grip and stood looking at him, stupidly making up his mind. The priest was undoubtedly within his right if he chose to make the claim, and already in the room Mikhail Etolin could hear the murmur of interest and assent that ran from mouth to mouth. His face flushed violently and he made a determined stand.

''That is for the dying,'' he said contemptuously. ''There is no application when the man is dead!'' The priest's eyes blazed and he threw up an interrupting hand.

'' 'For those who suffer accident and come to bloody death,' '' he quoted solemnly. ''How did he die, Mikhail Etolin? How did he come to die?''

As before, his question had all the bitterness

of accusation and his eyes did not once waver while he waited for a reply. Mikhail Sergeievitch's slow wits failed to find for him a ready answer and he stood, swelling vindictively and looking angrily, first at his accuser, and then at the people in the room. His confusion made Simeon Gvosdef still more bold. Pushing out his head till his face almost touched that of the man to whom he spoke, he delivered a final shot.

"Is it that you are afraid, Mikhail Sergeievitch, of that which I should see?" he demanded in a whisper so shrill that it was audible all around the room. The lieutenant came to his senses with a snort.

"Bah!" he cried, "what is there to conceal? Give me the knife!" Checked unexpectedly in his attempt at personal examination of the corpse, the priest hesitated for a moment and then irresolutely surrendered the weapon that he held. Mikhail Sergeievitch took it without a word and, turning to the dead man, began in his deliberate way to rip out the stitches at the point where Simeon Gvosdef had stopped. The priest had not imagined that the lieutenant would yield to his demand, and standing with

close-pressed hands and muscles rigid as if he had been turned to stone, followed his advance with a look in his eyes that was almost terror.

When the opening in the shroud had been lengthened almost to the waist, Mikhail Etolin laid down the knife and, reaching under the cloth, laid hold of Moissei Gvosdef's hand with the intention of drawing it outside. But the joints had stiffened in the time that he had been dead and when Mikhail Etolin pulled, the whole body moved toward him as if it had been alive.

There was an instant stir of horror in the room and the dead man's father sprang forward with a pathetic little cry. But before he reached the body, Mikhail Etolin, steadying it with one hand, drew out with the other the unwilling limb and slid the cloth deftly under it again down to the side.

The clothing had been thriftily taken from Moissei Gvosdef's body before it was closed in and the arm was bare from the shoulder to the wrist. Mikhail Etolin turned sharply away from it and faced the priest. His lips were drawn into a snarl, and he thrust down the hand that had held the dead man's and rubbed the

palm of it against his thigh, as if to cleanse it from something that was unclean.

"Is this enough?" he demanded harshly. "Give him the passport and make a finish of your work!" The priest came swiftly to the body and, bending down, slipped the paper into the dead man's half-closed hand.

"Go now to God," he said brokenly. "I have done what I could and, if it is His will, you shall enter into His peace."

His fingers lingered lovingly on the unresponsive flesh and he ended by drawing down the flap that covered up the face and kissing him tenderly between the eyes. Then, as gently, he drew back the cover into place, and, as if the thing had never happened, took from the table his book and, opening it, began to read the service he had so long delayed.

Mikhail Etolin interpreted his action as a final admission of defeat and after watching him closely for a time, returned to his former seat. The priest, however, had not abandoned his purpose, but was simply biding his time. He read on steadily and without change of voice, but his shifty eyes were always on Mikhail Etolin and he watched intently for the lapse

in vigilance on his part that alone could promise him success.

He followed custom closely in the service, except that, when he knelt, it was not before the altar, but by the body's side. More than once his hand stole cautiously out toward the desired goal, only to find that the lieutenant was alert and it was but the part of caution to delay the chance. But in the end his patience was rewarded and before the closing prayer the crisis came.

Those assembled had risen from the confession and the priest, kneeling beside the body, raised up his voice in the beautiful *Rest with the saints, O Christ, Thy servant's soul.* His listeners, responsive to the grave sweetness of the chant, joined in till the place was filled with the stirring tide of song. The baby fretted, and Tatiana Vassilievna, herself grown nervous with the excitement and the child's care, rose from her place and walked softly back and forth behind the seats and hushed it by moving it gently up and down.

But at the sharp break in the music where the voices stop and there is silence before they are lifted in the grand final strain, her feelings

overcame her and, with her breast pressed close against the window-sill, she sobbed bitterly aloud. Mikhail Etolin's attention was caught by the unusual sound. Forgetting for the moment his vigil over the priest, he turned his head and looked to see whence the interruption came.

It was only for a moment, but it was enough. Stealthily but swiftly the priest's hand went out and disappeared beneath the canvas that covered the body of the dead. For a brief instant he kept his posture till he was fully sure. Then with a cry that drew all faces toward himself, he sprang to his feet and stripped back the covering so that the boy's whole body was exposed.

"See!" he cried wildly. "See! What will he tell me now?" He raised the body so that it was visible to all who were in the room. The skin showed pallid in the uncertain light, but over the heart there was an open wound and around it the brown stain of blood that those who prepared it for burial had not thought it worth while to wash away.

There was a stir of responsive excitement among the lookers-on, and more than one moved

involuntarily from his place. But the feeling that it was Mikhail Etolin's affair, not theirs, held all of them in check, and they waited where they were, with eyes turned curiously on the lieutenant to see what he would do.

At the first cry from the priest, his eyes had come swiftly back to the scene in front of him and he made a movement forward as if to interfere. Then, seeing that the harm was done and that no word or artifice of his could further set aside the truth, he stopped and with a shrug of resignation stood in his place and waited like the rest.

Simeon Gvosdef held up the body only for a moment and then let it drop slowly to the bench. As if suddenly ashamed that he had so exposed its nakedness, he hastily drew up the cloth and with awkward hands endeavored to arrange smoothly over it the narrow folds. Then, as he raised his head, his glance fell on Mikhail Etolin and his paternal tenderness was swept aside by the thought of the way in which he had been wronged.

He drew himself up to his full height and fixed on the lieutenant a look so fierce in the intensity of its hate that Mikhail Etolin's eyes

went involuntarily before it to the floor. For a time no word was said and the priest continued standing with his lips working dryly at the words he could not speak. Then his desire for revenge found need for something more than speech and his hand went groping out behind him to the table and took hold on the knife where Mikhail Etolin had laid it down. His purpose was so plain that a dozen men among the spectators started hurriedly to their feet. The interference was not needed, however, for their movement broke the spell for Simeon Gvosdef, so that the reaction came.

He drew the weapon to him and even took a step forward with it in his hand. But he could not hold either hand or body steady and shook his head savagely again and again as if to clear away some obstruction that hung before his eyes. He made a pitiable struggle with himself to regain his self-control, but in spite of his determination, his movements grew more wavering and his eyes less bright until, with a sharp cry of anguish and despair, he let himself go and plunged headlong to the floor. Mikhail Etolin saw to his uplifting and ordered him carried out. Then, turning to the little group that had

watched the tragedy with wondering eyes, he said in his deliberate way:

"We will not wait for the finishing of this service for the dead. Moissei Gvosdef will be buried at once and without further rite. And lest some of you who have seen what has happened here to-night should remember and not understand, I will say that this man's death was not a murder made possible by me, but a just and necessary thing and mercifully done!"

CHAPTER V

SIMEON, THE PRIEST, FINDS A MISSION

Peter Efimovitch was the only man among the new-comers who did not find his quarters in the barrack-sheds. He had been billeted there with the rest, but, after a short inspection of the comforts of the place, with his usual decision of character, he had taken up his bed and retired with it to the house where Motrya Petrovna and Tatiana Vassilievna had been lodged.

The first night he spent in peace, but the second day his defection was reported to the lieutenant, who promptly ordered Ivan Egorovitch to tell him to return. The young man accepted the commission with reluctance.

"Send somebody else, Mikhail Sergeievitch," he begged ruefully. "The old man has none too good an opinion of me now, and if I go, he will never afterward let me come into the house."

"Bah!" said the lieutenant with a grin. "It will give you a chance to even up with him

for some of the trouble he caused you once at home. I suppose, though, for that matter, you might let the women decide. He will have to have his own house in the end and if they are not crowded, it will probably do no harm."

Ivan Egorovitch seized on the alternative with a grateful heart. As a tribute of good feeling, he dropped down the channel in his boat and gathered another armful of the flowers in which Motrya Petrovna had found delight, and, thus equipped, presented himself irresolutely at the women's door. He found them busy with the unpacking and arrangement of their things. Peter Efimovitch sat in the doorway where he could see both in and out, and smoked and looked on contentedly while the others worked. Tatiana Vassilievna, her sleeves rolled up and her hair bristling in disorder with the vigor of her activity, was sorting various articles and bustlingly carrying one after another to its appointed place. Motrya Petrovna was seated on the floor, with the baby handy on a mattress, and on her other side a hamper half unpacked, from which she was lifting out the articles that Tatiana Vassilievna put away.

With a surly nod of welcome, the old man made room for Ivan Egorovitch to pass in and he entered and stood waiting, his flowers in his hand. Motrya Petrovna rose at once and came to him.

"More flowers?" she said. "I might have known that you would think." She took them from him and stood looking for a place in the confusion where they could be safely set.

"They will be a comfort in the house," she said, "but I am waiting most impatiently for you to take me where I can pick them for myself."

"It is only a question of the day," he answered. "As soon as it is bright you shall surely go."

"I shall ask Stepan Dmitrievitch to do it for me if you forget. If he is to be of the family, as you promised, I am going to make him useful from the start." Ivan Egorovitch gave a chuckle of delight.

"You had better stick to me," he counseled. "I have not a doubt but Stepan Dmitrievitch would do his best, but I do not believe he would know a blossom from a bramble, if he had it in his fist."

"He is a good hunter," retorted the girl with a show of warmth. "He brought us a lot of birds that he had shot this morning." Ivan Egorovitch gave an understanding cry.

"Ah!" he said, "that is why he got out so early. I wondered where it was that he had gone."

"He is coming back to help us eat them," she volunteered demurely. "Tatiana asked him. She is a splendid cook." Ivan Egorovitch drew up his shoulders ruefully.

"On that chance any man here would go out of his way to be of service to her," he said. "I should be glad to get in her good graces myself."

"And yet you forgot her and only remembered to bring flowers to me!" she murmured, her eyes bent on him as if in serious reproof. The young man looked doubtfully at her and then at Tatiana Vassilievna and his face flushed. The girl laughed aloud as she saw his discomfiture.

"You do not take teasing now any better than you used to, Ivan Egorovitch," she said delightedly. Then, turning, she called to the other woman across the room: "Tatiana, Ivan

Nilof has come to help us put away the things. He will stay to dinner, so you must not forget to put him in the pot." Tatiana Vassilievna straightened up from her work as if to rest her back and looked thoughtfully at the young man.

"Men are really useful, sometimes, in a house," she said, with the air of one who has suddenly discovered a new truth. "But you have to stick to them like a wet leaf to get much out of them. I have been telling the Lord in my prayers what I think of the company that has kept my man back there in Yakutat and left me to come on here and settle down alone." The young man laughed and nodded vigorously.

"It is a pleasant thing, though," he said, "that you recognize us even as a necessary evil in the house." Then turning again to Motrya Petrovna he added in a lower tone: "It is good of you to ask me. What am I to do to earn my dinner as I should?"

"Nothing, of course. What I meant was that from Tatiana's point of view, at least, it is the young man who comes with something definite to offer who is most likely to be asked

to stay." A sudden remembrance of why he himself had come swept over Ivan Egorovitch, and he looked at the girl beside him with troubled eyes.

"I, too, had a mission in seeing you to-day," he said with some hesitation, "but I fear that when you hear what it is, you will not be so satisfied to have me stay." The girl raised her eyes to his in expectant curiosity.

"What is it?" she demanded eagerly.

"Mikhail Sergeievitch is disturbed because your father did not remain with the others as he was ordered and sleep in the warehouse sheds. He sent me to-day to tell him he must go back."

The girl's face grew serious and she looked past him speculatively to where Peter Efimovitch sat. The old man was still smoking contentedly, absorbed apparently in pleasant thought. But there was a stiffness in the way he held himself even in repose and a certain setness in the lines about his mouth, which carried the conviction that even at the best of times he kept a wary and suspicious eye on life. The girl let her eyes linger lovingly on him for a moment before she spoke.

"Are you sure," she said, without looking at Ivan Egorovitch, "that he was told he must stay?"

"I did not hear them given, but I understood that he had the same instructions as the rest."

"I can hardly believe," said the girl slowly, "that he would be foolish enough to antagonize the lieutenant at the start. I will ask him, though. But if he has made up his mind," she added with a sigh, "I am afraid you will not get him to return." She went at once to where Peter Efimovitch was sitting and Ivan Egorovitch followed her to the door.

"Father," she began, "Ivan Nilof says that Mikhail Sergeievitch is vexed because you did not go with the others to the warehouse to sleep." Peter Efimovitch came out of his reverie and looked keenly from her to the young man.

"Well?" he said interrogatively, and there was an unconscious hardening of the lines about his mouth. Motrya Petrovna returned bravely to the attack.

"Is it true," she demanded, "that you knew at the time that you were expected to stay in that place?" Peter Efimovitch's eyes re-

mained fixed on her steadily and in them began to burn a small malevolent spark.

"Yes, it is true," he said coolly, and waited as before.

"Then why did you not do it? It was not prudent, at the least, to defy the lieutenant the first time he gave you a command."

"I did not like it," returned the old man shortly. "It was not clean and I would rather be with you."

"But what good will it do you?" persisted the girl. "He has sent to-day to say that you must go back." Peter Efimovitch set his teeth together with a snap.

"I will not!" he declared grimly. "I am an accountant, not a laborer, and am entitled to different treatment from the hunters and the rest."

"I do not think," said Ivan Egorovitch timidly, "that Mikhail Sergeievitch had in mind at all in sending you to the barracks that the going would put you out. The order was made simply because he feared it would make it too crowded for the women to have you here with them in the house."

"Let them settle that for themselves!" re-

torted the old man sullenly. "I prefer to remain here where I am."

Inserting his pipe between his teeth, he turned his back on them both and began again the contemplation of the surrounding scenery that had been holding his attention when he was first disturbed. He had so much the air of having said the final word that Motrya Petrovna turned helplessly to Ivan Egorovitch with a look of despairing interrogation on her face. He put his hand out to her with a smile.

"Do not worry," he said in a whisper. "Would Tatiana Vassilievna object, if he should be allowed to stay?" She put her hand into his almost unconsciously and let it remain there while she spoke.

"I do not think so," she said earnestly. "Let us ask her and see what she will say." They went into the house together and out to the farther room where the older woman was at work.

"You tell her," said Motrya Petrovna under her breath. Ivan Egorovitch responded promptly to her wish.

"Tatiana Vassilievna," he began, "are you so crowded here that you would prefer to

have Peter Efimovitch go somewhere else to sleep?"

Zakar Medvedef's wife thought slowly, and the skin was so tight over her plump figure that as she undertook the process and stood still, considering, she seemed about to burst. Motrya Petrovna watched anxiously for the first indication of a break. When it came it was a smile, and the girl unconsciously took heart of her distress.

"It is a little thick," said the older woman frankly. "He has to sleep in this room and I tread on him some in the mornings when I cook, but you never could put him anywhere else. He hits up against everything above him as naturally as a fish under the ice, and would be unhappy all the time. He is not always as thankful as one would like, about what is set before him, but on the whole I have got accustomed to him and would really be lonesome if I could not hear him cluck." Motrya Petrovna made a sudden rush at her and put both arms about her neck.

"I thought you would say he might stay," she cried. "He is a trial, I know, but I could not bear to think of his going out there by

himself." She did not wait for an answer, but danced away to where Ivan Egorovitch stood.

"Come," she said, seizing him impatiently by the hand. "Let us go and tell him it is all right."

Ivan Egorovitch went out with her on this errand with less liking than he had come in. At heart he still had a wholesome fear of the fierce old man and had no desire to approach him unnecessarily, even as a bearer of good news. The girl, however, had no such qualms and hurried him unwilling on his way.

"Father," she said breathlessly, "Tatiana has no objections and Ivan is going to arrange it so that you can stay." Peter Efimovitch raised his head quickly and listened as if he had not heard aright.

"Who is going to arrange it?" he demanded.

"Ivan Nilof." The old man blew through his nose disdainfully and his face relaxed into a grin. He still retained the opinion of the young man that he had gained through observation of his vacillating youth, and the thought of leaning on him for assistance came to him somewhat as a joke.

"I suspect," he said dryly, "that his inter-

cession will be worth about as much to me as the thanks I shall give him in return—and they will not be large." Ivan Egorovitch's face flushed angrily at the unexpected insult and a sharp answer rose up on his tongue. But Motrya Petrovna was quicker than he. Her face was redder than his with shame and she laid her hand restrainingly on his arm.

"Don't, Ivan,—for my sake!" she said appealingly, and in the same breath she turned to the old man.

"Oh, how could you, how could you!" she cried indignantly, "when he was simply trying to be kind!"

Peter Efimovitch did not answer, but it was plain from his face that he felt he had gone too far. He sat for a moment looking moodily at the ground and then, with an inarticulate snarl of discontent, rose and went past them into the house. Motrya Petrovna kept her hold on Ivan Egorovitch until her father was fairly out of sight. Then she raised her face to his with tremulous lips and eyes that were ashamed.

"You will not mind him, will you, Ivan?" she said coaxingly. "He is old and not well and he can not always hold his temper as he

should." Ivan Egorovitch swallowed his indignation bravely and showed a willingness to be beguiled.

"I shall have no feeling," he said magnanimously, "but for a time, at least, I think I had better go."

"But you will come back?" she cried, with a shade of disappointment in her voice. Ivan Egorovitch smiled down at her and took both her hands.

"Have no fear of that, little sister," he said reassuringly. "I am going now, simply because I have other things to do. I shall even be back for the dinner that Tatiana Vassilievna is about to cook. It is no new thing to me that your father does not like me. That other time, I was foolish enough to let him drive me out. But now, I have tested the sweetness of your friendship and unless you yourself insist upon it, he shall not make me go." He raised her hands affectionately and touched them to his lips. Then, with a bow of grave politeness, he released her and went whistling out along the path.

He had several commissions on his list which took him to different points about the camp,

and as the last of these he came to the barrack-sheds, and set himself to see how Simeon Gvosdef fared.

The little priest had been a long time coming out of his unconscious state, though he had received no hurt more serious than bruises from his headlong fall. They had carried him to his appointed place in the warehouse and made him as comfortable as possible upon his bed. All the night he lay there as quiet as if he had been dead and paid no heed to those who spoke to him. What thoughts, if any, either of sorrow or vengeance, came to him there was no way to know. In the morning he opened his eyes and asked for water, which with food was brought to him and laid convenient to his hand.

He was conscious after this, but made no effort to sit up or rise. Either he had suffered some sort of stroke or had been stunned temporarily by the horror of what he had just gone through. It was probably the latter, because when Ivan Egorovitch came to him, he knew him at once and made as if he wished to speak to him.

"What can I do for you, Simeon Gvosdef?" asked the young man kindly, bending above him

to catch what he would say. "What is it that you want?" The sick man made an ineffectual effort to shake off the deadly physical weakness that held him bound and looked up at Ivan Egorovitch with wide-opened eyes. He realized the uselessness of the struggle in his present state and for the moment bent his energy toward gaining strength.

"Brandy," he whispered, "give me brandy, quick!" Ivan Egorovitch raised himself and looked helplessly around. There was no liquor closer at hand than the nearest house, but he made up his mind on the thought and was swift to act.

"You shall have it in a moment," he promised and was immediately on the way. When he returned, the priest's eyes were shut and he did not move, but Ivan Egorovitch raised his head and poured some of the liquor between his lips. The priest swallowed it unconsciously and after a moment the color began to come back into his cheeks. He opened his eyes and made a feeble attempt to raise himself upright. Ivan Egorovitch watched him with satisfaction, and his lips parted in a smile.

"That is better, is it not?" he said cheer-

fully. "You will be all right now when you get something to eat." Simeon Gvosdef did not answer him, but kept his eyes fixed on him with the same devouring look.

"What is it now?" asked the young man curiously. The priest's mouth opened and he breathed rather than spoke his words.

"Moissei—what did they do with him?" he demanded.

"They buried him. It was done immediately after the service was through." The priest closed his eyes and lay passively considering, and after a moment the tears began to run from under his shut lids. Then, with the accession of strength that came with the little rest, he opened his eyes suddenly and flashed their solemn gaze again on the young man.

"The lieutenant—" he said slowly, "what have they done with him?" Ivan Egorovitch did not clearly understand.

"Why, nothing," he said. "What did you expect them to do?" The priest did not answer, but remained as he was, without even trying to wipe away his tears.

"I would like to see him," he said finally. "Do you think he would come?"

"If you wish it," returned the young man obligingly, "I will go and see."

"Do!" said the other eagerly, and settled down on his bed.

Ivan Egorovitch went directly to the house of the lieutenant, but found that he was not at home. He guessed that Mikhail Etolin was out on one of his irregular tours of inspection among the men and, following after him, discovered him with his coat off, working with the group that was felling trees for the construction of houses for the new settlers at the post. In few words he stated to the lieutenant the wish of the priest that he should come.

"What does he want with me?" asked Mikhail Sergeievitch suspiciously.

"He did not say," returned the young man, "but it was the only thing he did ask for and I thought perhaps that you would want to go."

"Well," said the lieutenant, "I shall have to have it out with him sooner or later and I suppose it might as well be now. Come along," he added, smoothing down his blouse.

Simeon Gvosdef was brighter when they reached him and seemed to have more strength. He had drunk the rest of the brandy and had

eaten some of the food that had been placed for him beside his bed. He did not try to lift himself from where he lay, but acknowledged the coming of the lieutenant, when he stood beside him, with a lifting of the head which, if he had been standing erect, would have been a bow of courtesy and respect.

"You sent for me," said the lieutenant stiffly. "What is it that you want?" For the moment the priest did not answer, but remained looking mournfully at Mikhail Sergeievitch and murmuring inaudibly to himself.

"Why did you do it?" he asked tremulously, when he got his lips into control. "Why did you not tell me the truth?" Mikhail Etolin's phlegmatic heaviness stood him in good stead and, under the question, his big face remained as stolid as a mask.

"You are not strong enough to worry about this now," he answered. "Wait till you are well and I will tell you everything I know."

"Did you kill him?" persisted the priest searchingly. Mikhail Etolin's face stirred with the first sign of feeling it had shown.

"No! Before God, I did not!" he cried with earnestness. The only part of Simeon Gvosdef

that seemed alive was his eyes, but they fastened on Mikhail Etolin's face as if they would search him to the bottom of his soul. For an unbearable moment the priest kept them thus steadily fixed, and then let the lids shut slowly over them again as if the search had ended for the time.

"I do not believe you," he said simply. "You did not tell me the truth before." He lay back silently and turned away his head, and the fat man began to breathe more quickly as his excitement rose.

"Why did you send for me, then," he wheezed, "if you can not believe me, now that I am come?" The priest's eyes opened again with startling suddenness and fixed themselves as before on Mikhail Etolin's face.

"Why did I send for you, Mikhail Etolin?" he repeated in his low, even voice. "Because I wanted to tell you what I am here to do. God is going to punish you, Mikhail Etolin, and you are going to die."

He paused a moment to regain his breath and in the respite the lieutenant crossed himself vigorously twice. He was not a superstitious man, but the strangeness of the affair and the sinister threat of evil to himself stirred him

mechanically to be on his guard. The priest's eyes opened almost at once and he began again in his slow, colorless speech.

"I do not know where I was all this last dreadful night," he said solemnly, "whether with God or here. But wherever it was, I saw Him there and I know that what I tell you now is true. You are going to die, Mikhail Etolin, and if you want the proof, it is that I was not allowed to die last night, but was sent back here to see that the happening surely comes to pass. I know now how it is to come and when, but I will not tell you yet. The shadow of it I know is over you from this time. You will not need to watch for it. It will be only days before it will begin to come to you so that you yourself will see." The strain of the long speech exhausted him and he lay back breathlessly upon the bed. He was still so long that Mikhail Etolin thought he was done.

"Well, is that all?" he said finally. His tone was defiant, but his voice was husky and constrained. Simeon Gvosdef collected himself for a final effort and spoke with a conviction that could not be misunderstood.

"No," he said determinedly, "that is not

all. I have yet to tell you what it is that has been given me to do. God has made me His instrument in this matter, Mikhail Etolin, and I am to pray for it every day until it comes. Among the things I brought here for the church there is a service bell. To-night at six I shall ring it so that you will hear and to-morrow morning it will ring again. And so at noon and then to-morrow night. Every day until the end it will be rung three times so long as I have strength, and every time it rings I shall pray to God—and you will know that I am praying to God—that He will keep His promise, that your punishment shall come!"

He had worked himself into such a fever of excitement that there was almost inspiration in his haggard look, and as he finished the last words he lifted himself from the pillow and pointed at Mikhail Etolin with a sternly accusing hand. He remained thus for a moment, propping himself by his arm. Then he fell back again, a pathetic, shrunken heap upon the bed.

"I am done," he said, and turned himself resolutely to the wall. Mikhail Etolin stood looking at him for a time in silence and then moved away to where Ivan Egorovitch stood.

"I shall pray to God that your punishment shall come!"

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He was startled and somewhat shaken by the prophecy made against him, although he was too practical a man to hold it seriously in belief. Ivan Egorovitch was much more impressed and showed his perturbation in his face.

"The man is not himself," said the lieutenant in a low tone. "He will look at the matter differently when once we get him well."

He beckoned Ivan Egorovitch with his head, moving with him to the door, and once outside, the two men went along together on the way. The lieutenant was in no mood for talking, and Ivan Egorovitch did not dare to break in on his thought. At the parting of the paths, however, Mikhail Etolin stopped and spoke of his own accord.

"You had better, perhaps, say nothing of this matter," he said slowly. "The man is a fool or insane, but some people might be superstitious about it and I would rather it would not be talked over among the men."

CHAPTER VI

THE RINGING OF THE BELL

Mikhail Etolin was not a man of wide imagination, and Simeon Gvosdef's prophecy failed to impress itself on him as it might have done on one of a more sensitive mind. But the sincerity of the priest, the unusual solemnity that attached to the delivery of the warning because of his weakened condition of body as he spoke, and, perhaps, more than all, the superstitious fear of the power of evil that is an undercurrent universal in the Russian soul, conspired to impress the message on him so that it remained a distinct recollection.

As he went about his work he had the uneasy consciousness of knowing that the thing was there, though the impression was not strong enough to render him especially disturbed. As far as he was able, he dismissed the matter from his conscious thought and when it came to him unconsciously, he found no serious diffi-

culty in putting forth the effort of will that was needed to set it aside. Yet in spite of all endeavor he could not blot it entirely from his mind, and as the time moved on toward six o'clock, he found himself wondering vaguely whether the priest would really carry out his threat.

"He is too sick," he said to himself, "and besides, if he comes to his senses and is not, he will be of a different mind."

He loosened his garments and sat down as usual before the door of his house for his evening cup of tea. The fog still filled the nearer spaces so that he could not see the warehouse or the dwellings beyond. But with the cessation of the work about the post, there had fallen a silence so complete that he could hear the roar of the ice as it broke from the edge of the glacier and fell into the water at the farther limit of the bay.

It was too still for comfort in his present mood, though, without loneliness, he had been conscious of the silence many times before; and it was a welcome interruption therefore when his servant came outside to him and called him to his evening meal.

He rose with his usual deliberation and turned out the remaining liquid from his cup. He shook the dish sharply to expel the final drops, and then in the motion, remained fixed —with head pushed forward and arm outstretched—for suddenly, without warning, there came to him the sound of Simeon Gvosdef's bell.

It was evidently not a large bell, for the volume of its sound was neither deep nor great. But in the evening stillness its finer tone lost none of its distinctness through being small, and it seemed to Mikhail Etolin as if it might be heard for miles. He knew, too, that he could not be mistaken in the matter, in that up to this time there had been no other bell about the post.

For a moment he stood there motionless, with a queer sensation of tightness about the heart. The bell was being tolled rather than rung, and there was something so oppressive in its long plaintive note that Mikhail Etolin, hearing it, felt his spirits sink within him whether he would or not.

Then he came to himself with a start and looked hastily from side to side to see if he had been observed. He found no watcher spy-

ing on his fear and, with a shake of his great body, as if to rid himself of an uncanny possession, he turned his back on the irritating sound and went stolidly into the house.

He sat down at the table and poured himself a glass of brandy, more generous than usual, to warm his blood and give himself an appetite for the meal. There had come, on the *bidarka,* certain luxuries, besides the usual and necessary stores, and his cook, taking advantage of the opportunity, had made for him some of the three-cornered dumplings filled with cheese, of which he was inordinately fond; and on the table beside them, he found a dish of salted cucumbers, the first he had seen for months. His eyes glistened as they rested on the food and he grinned as he transferred the first instalment to his plate.

"I may be going to die," he said to himself, "but, it will not be from lack of decent food."

He quite enjoyed himself in the heat of the attack and for some time forgot practically the canker that was preying on his mind. When it did come back, it took the form of curiosity as to what had happened at the warehouse when the priest began to ring.

It was a foregone conclusion that the sound would draw spectators to the scene, and he found himself wondering if the priest had gone further than to ring the bell.

If, as in his prophecy he had advised him he would do, Simeon Gvosdef simply followed up his ringing with a prayer, those who had come to gaze would go away but little wiser for their pains. But if the spirit moved him to repeat in public the warning he had before privately bestowed, the men were so ignorant and superstitious that the effect would not be toward good either for him or them.

The more he thought of it the more he was convinced that it was a thing to receive attention, that the priest should not relate his story to the men, if only that his authority over them should not be impaired. He got up from the table and went to listen at the door. The sound of the bell had ceased some time before and there was nothing unusual to reward the attention he gave.

"It is probably all done," he said to himself moodily, "and I could not change it by going out there now." He came back to the table and stood drumming on it with his fingers' ends

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and looked irresolutely at the place where he had sat.

"I had practically finished anyhow," he murmured absently. "I hope he has not spread it to the camp."

But Simeon Gvosdef was not the man to hurt by silence a cause so near his heart. When Mikhail Etolin came close enough to the warehouse so the mist no longer hid its front, he saw that a group of from ten to fifteen men was already gathered there before the door.

Between them and the building was the priest. He was kneeling with his face upturned as if in prayer, but though his lips moved constantly, Mikhail Etolin could hear no sound and it was evident to him that the people were waiting to see what he would do next, rather than listening to what he said.

The men in the group recognized the lieutenant almost as soon as he saw them, and there was an immediate stir among them of a sort that showed something unusual had occurred. Mikhail Etolin's red face grew redder as he realized that he had come too late. Under his gaze, the onlookers began to stand farther apart from one another and one by one to slip quietly away.

The lieutenant watched them with an irritation he did not attempt to quell. His first thought was to order the priest under arrest and so make an end to the affair at once, but cooler judgment held him back lest he should appear to make too much of an action that he was not yet sure was criminal in intent. The only course that on the moment seemed a fit one was to question those who had been present and from their statements determine on a plan.

By the time he had decided what to do, there were only two or three of the bystanders who still stood their ground. Of these he singled out Stepan Dmitrievitch, who was the nearest by, and beckoning him, went with him a little space apart.

"What is the trouble?" he demanded fretfully. "Why are these people gathered here?" Stepan Dmitrievitch was palpably disturbed and showed his perturbation in his face.

"It was because of the bell, your Well-born," he said, casting down his eyes. "They came to see why it was rung." The lieutenant himself felt a sudden embarrassment, as if Stepan Dmitrievitch must be aware he had been already warned.

"Why was it rung?" he asked with difficulty. Stepan Dmitrievitch shifted awkwardly on his feet and manifestly chose his words.

"It was because Simeon Gvosdef had something he felt he should announce. He has had a vision."

"A vision!"

"Yes, a warning which, while he was lying on his bed there, was sent to him from God."

Mikhail Etolin's self-consciousness made it a struggle with him to appear properly unconcerned. He kept his eyes suspiciously on his companion, but Stepan Dmitrievitch was himself so disturbed that he should be the bearer of bad news, that he kept his own glance on the ground and made no observation of Mikhail Sergeievitch's face. The lieutenant waited till he could hold his voice so it would not shake.

"For whom was this warning given?" he said slowly. "For himself?"

"No, your Well-born," said the young man faintly, "it was for you."

"For me!"

"Yes, for you. He said that God told him you were going to die."

In spite of the fact that he had known before-

hand what the priest's prophecy must have been, Mikhail Etolin felt a shiver run over him and experienced again the same uneasy tightness at the heart. His face, however, did not change, and he turned to the other with a shrug of disbelief.

"Bah!" he said impatiently. "One does not believe in foolishness like that!"

The young man's face grew more grave. He lost the fear of what he had to tell, now that the thing was told, and was only solicitous for the other's good.

"How can one be sure, Mikhail Sergeievitch?" he said seriously. "It is certainly a truth to Simeon Gvosdef, and having been told, it would be foolish not to be prepared." His simple faith jarred on the lieutenant, the more that he did not like to admit even to himself that his own fear had been touched.

"Look at me!" he cried angrily. "Do I seem like one about to die?" The young man raised his eyes and looked him over with a smile.

"You are a strong man, your Well-born," he said simply, "and there are many others of us here that would seem more sure to be the first to go. But if God has willed it, it will come,

and what will you do if, after a little, you should find the change coming to you as he has said?" The lieutenant's glance rose to him sharply and his voice was abrupt in his demand.

"What change?" he insisted sternly. "What was it that he said?" His sudden warmth seemed to Stepan Dmitrievitch no more than the awakening of interest proper in the case and he noted it without surprise.

"It was very little," he said, "beyond the fact that the thing would positively come. Of that he was sure and also that it would not be long delayed."

A pregnant question framed itself on Mikhail Sergeievitch's lips, but he hesitated long before he put it into words. Finally, however, his interest got the better of his desire to appear unmoved and he let it out, speaking slowly and impersonally and with as strong an expression of impassivity as he was able to command.

"Was there then no revelation as to how the thing would come?" he asked.

"Only this much, that if we would know it in its coming we should watch you as you breathed." Mikhail Etolin received the information with a puzzled stare. His mind went

floundering among the probabilities like a hooked fish, turning blindly this way and that, and striving with sullen irritation to shake off this new bond that threatened to hold him in.

"But I breathe all the time!" he said resentfully.

"Of course," returned the young man, "but within a fortnight he said we should see a change." The lieutenant considered the proposition thoughtfully.

"Well," he said with a tinge of quiet contempt, "when the change comes I shall believe. In the meantime if you see it and I do not, I shall depend on you to let me know!" He bowed stiffly and Stepan Dmitrievitch understood that the interview was at an end. Bowing respectfully in turn, he saluted awkwardly and went away, leaving the lieutenant watching him much as if he had detected him in the commission of some petty crime.

When Mikhail Etolin turned again, the place was clear and there was no one there except the priest. He was still on his knees in prayer and the lieutenant, hesitating to break in on his devotions, waited impatiently till he should be done. But even then he was thwarted in bring-

ing Simeon Gvosdef to speech. The priest saw him as he rose, faced him fearlessly, and before the lieutenant could begin what he had to say, commenced himself to speak.

"You see it has begun, Mikhail Sergeievitch," he said with a sort of solemn joy, "but it is not with me you must make your peace. It is with God!" He raised his hand significantly as he spoke and before the lieutenant could stir his slow tongue to reply he turned about and went swiftly into the house.

Had he shown in his manner the smallest touch of maliciousness or spite, Mikhail Etolin would have known, without consideration, what measures he should take. But the priest's face reflected nothing but conviction and inspired belief, and the lieutenant stood in perplexed silence, finding no illuminating thought to guide him as he watched him disappear from sight.

The next morning at sunrise the priest rang the bell again, but this time Mikhail Etolin made no sign. When it rang at noon, he sent for Ivan Egorovitch.

"I want you to get the bell from Simeon Gvosdef," he said to him. "Do it quietly and without his knowledge if you can. It makes me

nervous when I hear it ring." It was a relief to him thus to decide on something definite, even though the accomplishment ran to an instrument rather than a cause. He worked with better spirit during the afternoon and was pompously jocular with the men. It was almost six when Ivan Egorovitch came to him again and he saw that the young man had empty hands.

"Well, where is it?" he demanded testily. "I thought I told you to bring it here to me!" Ivan Egorovitch shrugged his shoulders and threw up his palms.

"He was too sharp for us, your Well-born," he said apologetically. "I spent no little time in searching his effects and only now I found that he has tied the clapper and is carrying it with him hung around his neck." The lieutenant gave an exclamation of impatience and drew down his brows.

"Damn him!" he said, "I never thought of that!" Then some humor of the situation struck him and he grinned ruefully.

"He knows I can not use force," he complained, "so I suppose he has us for the time. But keep an open eye out for him, and lose no chance if he once sets it down."

Simeon Gvosdef was cautious and gave no opportunity for theft. The bell remained with him always and rang three times a day. Mikhail Etolin made no further sign of his displeasure beyond an order, cutting the priest out from the company mess.

"There is no church for service," he said, "and the company only pays for what it gets. Let the priest work at something like the others, and then I will see that he is fed."

Such work with Simeon Gvosdef, however, was hopelessly beyond his strength. He had risen promptly from his bed of sickness and the strain he had gone through seemed to have left him with no special bodily ill. But from the time of his awakening, his mind remained confused and dull and he spent his time wandering aimlessly from place to place, unable apparently to concentrate his energies on anything in the way of practical accomplishment.

The only thing in which he showed full interest and a normal mind, was the carrying-out of the scheme of vengeance he had determined on for the killing of his son. No weakness of memory was great enough to make him forgetful of the times to ring his bell. He wan-

dered widely, and sometimes its notes came down from the silence of the woods above or from a boat, or more often from the wooded island in the bay. His boy had been buried in this latter place beside the unfortunate sailors of La Perouse's ship, and near his grave he spent a large portion of his time.

But he was as punctual with his ringing as a clock, and it became a habit with him to follow Mikhail Etolin as he went his rounds and stand and watch him for the evidences of change which should show that the lieutenant's punishment had begun. It was a slim and precarious living for him at the start, but the men about him, though through fear of the lieutenant they did not dare openly to divide with him their meals, saw to it humanely that he did not starve. But when Tatiana Vassilievna had news of it, she did not hesitate to speak her mind.

"The lieutenant is a beast!" she declared indignantly. "If I had a soul like that, I would be afraid to show myself with my body off before Saint Peter at the gate! He'd never see me! I shall send for Mikhail Etolin and tell him what I think!" She deferred the inter-

view, however, for the household about her was strong in its counsel for patience and delay. It was with a distinct reservation, though, that she finally agreed.

"If he does not mind his ways, I will boil his kettle for him yet," she said defiantly.

This much at least she accomplished, that a family council was called on the spot to determine how best they could be of aid. There were present at it, both women, Peter Efimovitch and the two young men. Tatiana felt entirely free to speak her mind. She went into the nature and personal characteristics of the lieutenant with searching and objurgatory frankness, and with half a finger measured up the shallow depth of his heart. She left no detail to the imagination in the explosive statement of her disesteem, and met with contumely and scorn all suggestions from the others in palliation or defense.

Ivan Egorovitch was practically the only one to make any stand against the storm. His blood-brother had knowledge from which he might have spoken if he would, but he did not, like Ivan Egorovitch, stand in close personal relation to the lieutenant and, besides, his

slower nature made him inert in quick reply. But Ivan Egorovitch was sufficiently just in his judgments to feel that Mikhail Etolin was not wholly bad, and, besides, had at all times on his tongue the ready word to help a friend.

"You are too harsh, Tatiana Vassilievna," he said when he could get a chance to speak. "Mikhail Sergeievitch ought not to have made this order, but he is by no means bad at heart." Zakar Medvedef's wife sniffed disdainfully and drew up her nose.

"Now do not talk like that," she said reprovingly. "I wager he is not quite as spotless as a new moon!" Ivan Egorovitch laughed and Motrya Petrovna came promptly to his aid.

"Ivan is right, Tatiana," she said with a soft glance at the young man. "He knows Mikhail Sergeievitch better than we do and perhaps is better fitted to tell us how to go to work. That really, I suppose, is what we have to think about in the end." Ivan Egorovitch smiled gratefully at her and Stepan Dmitrievitch found his slower speech.

"The thing is a disgrace!" he said earnestly. "It should be protested against at least, it seems to me." Peter Efimovitch nodded vigor-

ously and made an inarticulate mumble of assent. He had taken a liking to Stepan Dmitrievitch as strong as was his dislike for his younger and more volatile blood-brother, and in questions of policy or debate was commonly on his side.

"Let him know it!" he said grimly. "Let him see that he must rule with a decent hand."

"I do not think, though, Peter Efimovitch," said Ivan Egorovitch deprecatingly, "that it would be well to antagonize him further by what we do. I believe we could arrange it without that." The old man threw up his hands in ungracious assent.

"Oh, well!" he said. "If you have a plan—" The young man flushed as he always did under Peter Efimovitch's implied irony.

"It is not that," he protested. "But there must be a way—"

"What is it, Ivan?" said Motrya encouragingly.

"This, if anything," he answered. "Mikhail Etolin can in no way object to Simeon Gvosdef's earning his living as a priest, and I thought perhaps we could furnish him the way."

"Of course we can!" cried the young girl enthusiastically. "It is a good idea!"

"I am not so sure," said Stepan Dmitrievitch cautiously, "unless we start him regularly by building him a church. We have so few occasions that would count."

"Nobody to be married and nobody to be born," chimed in Peter Efimovitch like an echo. "There are not enough stole fees here to support a cat!" Tatiana Vassilievna's face relaxed into a smile.

"If Mikhail Etolin would only die," she said with a sigh of longing, "I feel now as if I would contribute his burial costs myself. Not if he does it on a holiday, though," she added hastily. "My husband's brother, once, died during the 'bright week' and it cost us two roubles extra for the special prayers." Peter Efimovitch turned again to Ivan Egorovitch.

"Well," he said, "what ceremony do you propose to invent to make your plan here a success?"

"There is always some fee proper for confession," replied the young man thoughtfully, "and it is more than a year since most of us have confessed. But the thing I had particu-

larly in mind was to have him bless the new houses as they are built. There will be a number of them before we are all housed and by that time I think we could get him up a church."

"Of course!" exclaimed Motrya Petrovna. "I knew it would be a good plan." Tatiana Vassilievna beamed affectionately on her.

"Oh, you two are always hatching nest-eggs," she said in mock derision. "But what is he to do till we are ready to begin?"

"Why, the addition to this house will be ready in two days," cried the girl enthusiastically.

"And up to that time," added Ivan Egorovitch, "I will see to it that Simeon Gvosdef does not starve."

"Well, have it your own way, then," said Tatiana Vassilievna, "but I would like to tell Mikhail Sergeievitch what is on my mind!" she added with a sigh. Ivan Egorovitch turned to Motrya Petrovna with the pleasure of his triumph shining in his eyes.

"Thank you," he said, "for being of my mind, and since you are the one most interested with me in this affair, will you go with me now and help me to make the arrangement with the priest?"

"Of course," she answered promptly. Then, with a look at Tatiana Vassilievna, she added hesitatingly, "That is, if it will not take too long."

"I think we shall find him at the warehouse," said the young man. "But in any case I must be back to report to Mikhail Etolin within an hour."

Tatiana Vassilievna graciously nodded an assent and the girl detained him only till she could get a hat. She was dressed in a simple gown of some soft gray material and had a knot of color at her throat. Stepan Dmitrievitch watched the couple enviously as he saw them go, and Ivan Egorovitch assumed possession of the girl with the easy familiarity that came from close acquaintance with her as a child.

"You are very pretty to-day," he said, as he looked her up and down. "I am glad that I have got you away from the others and am going to have you to myself." She blushed a little at the boldness of the compliment, but was too accustomed to his teasing either to be ashamed or to take offense.

"If you would make the weather brighter," she said gaily, "you could have me much more

than you do. And it would be a good thing for me, too, in that I should be wanting you to come to take me and so would be trying to be pretty all the time." His eyes rested on her with an intensity of interest that was not wholly shadowed back to him from hers.

"You laugh at me," he said as they walked along. "Do you really know how much it is to me to have you here?" She looked up at him with cheerful seriousness in her face.

"I know that it is very much to me to have you here," she answered, "and that it would be more than lonesome if I found you gone. Why, then, can you not believe that I know you find the same comfort in thinking it about me?"

They had come to the warehouse and saw that Simeon Gvosdef was sitting at the door.

"I will tell you in a moment," he said under his breath, and they went on in silence till they came to where Simeon Gvosdef sat.

Ivan Egorovitch made no disclosure of their plan, but simply asked the priest if he would come and bless the house at the appointed time. Simeon Gvosdef was suspicious at the first, his memory connecting Ivan Egorovitch too closely with the man who, he believed, had killed his

son. But the girl's entreaties, added to the representations of the young man, made their way convincingly to his heart and in the end he agreed graciously to what they asked. When they had left him, the girl turned to Ivan Egorovitch with a sigh.

"I suppose we must go back now," she said resignedly, but there was a tinge of regret in her tone.

"Not at all!" he answered positively. "I am going to take you first up to the higher ground."

"But we can not see anything to-day," she objected.

"That has nothing to do with it. I have you now and I want you with me for the hour that was allowed. I am not going to give you up." As he spoke he changed his course abruptly to one side, and she turned and followed him without a word. He was the first lover to attempt authority over her and she found a pleasurable thrill in thus letting herself bend to his will.

It was only a few moments before they passed out of the clearing and into the heavy woods. It was not a pleasing place altogether, for the

underbrush was damp and clammy and from the trees the fog dripped with a constant patter, like rain. The path was wide and roomy, but Motrya Petrovna noticed that as Ivan Egorovitch walked beside her, his hand always touched hers as she went, and that, when she stood still, he remained so close to her that it was still against her arm.

"Why do you always touch me like that, Ivan?" she asked curiously. He flushed a little at the question, but looked at her with searching eyes.

"Do I?" he said with some self-consciousness. He remained looking at her thoughtfully for some moments as if probing the matter in his mind.

"I suspect I do, little sister," he said finally, "and do you really want me to tell you why?" He turned her to him, taking both her hands. "Look in my eyes," he said. "Perhaps you will find the answer there." She met his gaze frankly and without turning away her own, but the color in her cheeks grew deeper and mounted slowly until it reached her hair.

"You mean that you—care?" she said softly.

"Yes," he answered, "so very much that I am

no longer happy when I can not come to you." The girl looked at him thoughtfully and considered in her turn.

"Why, I do not feel like that toward you," she said with appalling frankness. "I am fond of you and love your friendship. But it is not a need with me—a thing I feel like that." He gave a little nervous laugh of disappointment.

"You will feel it sometime," he said moodily, "either for me or for some other man. It was too soon to tell you, but you tempted me with your eyes. I am glad, though, that I have told you, for now you will know what it means to me and it will remind you that sometime you are going to waken to the same dear tenderness for me." He had dropped one of her hands and, as he spoke, stood stroking the other with both of his. She listened to him passively and without attempting to move.

"There is only one thing that can prevent it," he went on slowly, "and that is that you already have the feeling for some other man." She lifted her eyes till they looked honestly into his.

"I have never had it toward any one, Ivan," she declared earnestly.

"Not even toward Stepan Dmitrievitch?" he said with a twinge of recollection.

"Oh—him!" she answered, forgetting, in her desire to satisfy this importunate questioner, that he had no right to ask. "I like him, of course, and he is good to me, but that is all."

"And has he, too, told you that he cared?" She was slow this time in answer, but it was plain there was nothing she wished to conceal.

"Yes," she said bravely. "He wanted to, but I would not let him—much." A wave of jealousy ran over the young man and he fairly lost his head.

"And did you let him hold your hands?" he asked searchingly. The girl responded by drawing her hands swiftly from his grasp.

"I shall not tell you," she said indignantly. "You have no right to ask." She put both her hands behind her and stepped back quickly till the path was between him and her.

"Let us not talk any more about it," she said more kindly. "Come, it is time we were going back."

She turned and started down the path and left him to follow as he would. It was only a moment before he closed the space between

them and began the effort to make atonement for his fault. She was firm, however, in her decision not to talk and only answered when he spoke of other things. But the greatest grief for him, in her behavior, lay in the fact that, from the first of the journey back, she kept a distance persistently between them so that at no time could he touch her hand.

CHAPTER VII

IVAN HAS A STRENUOUS DAY

Elijah's Day fulfilled its promise and brought the expected change. The low-lying fog that for a week had stretched itself between the little village and the sky went raveling out in long gray scarfs before the rising southern wind. There was a pleasant stir in everything and even the shallowest waters of the bay showed blue with the reflection from above. In the clean atmosphere one could see for miles, and distant objects lost their true perspective and came out distinct and clear. And so the look-out, early at his post, made out the boat that was to bring the remainder of the settlers down from Yakutat, some hours before it would otherwise have come within his ken.

Before the fact was cried, Ivan Egorovitch had gone with those whose work it was to begin the selection of the places for the autumn traps, and so was absent from the post. But from the

higher ground, he saw the coming craft almost as soon as did the lookout below, and watched it to its landing with resentful discontent.

The force of habit lingers, long after it has been consciously set aside; and having for years set up for himself Varenka Petrovna as a vital need, Ivan Egorovitch could not thus look down on the boat that was bringing her to the post, without some little flutter of the pulse. It was not longing and it was not pain. His heart had turned too surely to the younger girl to make it these. But there was still room for wonder as to whether, when he saw her, she would be as she was before, and what would be her greeting and what she would have to say.

He was not quite sure whether he was wholly at ease about this first meeting with his former love. If—as Motrya had said—Varenka had really suffered from his ungallant relinquishment of pursuit, it might be uncomfortable, to say the least, to have her at the post. And yet, with the unconscious egotism of youth, he wished that she might really show some evidences of blight and he felt a secret comfort in figuring what these blemishes might be.

He could see the small boats, like flies on

the water, go crawling back and forth between the *bidarka* and the shore; and then the indistinct movement at the landing which revealed that the new-comers were being separated and distributed to their various places of abode. But there was nothing more that he could make out certainly and after a time he went moodily back to his work.

The labor had been planned to fill a day, but the circuit laid out had been small, and many of the places proposed proved, on examination, so unsatisfactory that he did not dare to use them without first making a report. And so, not to his dissatisfaction, by early noon, he found himself among the new-comers who had taken his attention there above. There was distaste rather than eagerness in the thought of coming on Varenka Petrovna except in his own time and way, and so when the clearing was reached, instead of following out the usual path, he turned aside and skirted round by a more hidden way, so as to reach his own dwelling from the rear.

He paused for a moment before going in, to have a hasty look around the camp. There was nothing about the house where he had for-

merly lived to show that it harbored any other than the people he had left in it that morning when he went away. He listened for some evidence of life, but there was not even a sound of voices, except that, for a short moment, he fancied he caught the baby's fretful cry.

"They are at dinner," he thought, and with a sigh that was an expression of his vague loneliness and regret, he turned about and went quickly into the house.

Once inside, he stopped and looked around him in astonishment. There was no one there, but the floor was littered over with packages and stores and near the center, half unpacked, lay a great pile of covers for a bed. He looked the stuff over with growing curiosity.

"Stepan and I are to have companions," he said to himself. "I wonder who they are." He picked his way through the confusion and opened the door into the other room; and, as if in answer to his thought, he saw that it had an occupant and that he had come on her quite unawares.

At the farther side, where the light from the open door would shine on the person using it, a little mirror had been hung. And before this

stood a woman, with her hands above her head, engaged in putting the final touches to the arrangement of her hair. Her back was turned toward him, but he did not need to see her face to know her for the one who, for the greater part of the long morning, had occupied his thought.

His first instinct was to close the door as softly as he had opened it and retire without being seen. But some change in her demeanor apprised him that she had heard him come and was conscious of his presence, though she did not immediately turn her head. Instead, she went on calmly until she had finished her labor on the shining coil and only when the operation was done did she let down her hands and turn to look at him.

It was evident then that, in his intrusion, she had not suspected who he was. Her lips parted in a little gasp of recognition and the color flushed up redly in her cheeks. Beyond this, however, she held herself well in hand and did not speak or stir to go to him. The young man himself was equally confused and stood in silence, trying to formulate the greeting he should make. He found no words ready on his tongue

and at last, without plan, made virtue of his necessity and went boldly across the room.

Still she did not move, but stood looking at him with the same expression of passive expectancy and waited for him to come. His mind refused to work with any clearness and, when he was close to her, he was simply conscious that he had taken the hand she offered and was murmuring to her some form of inarticulate speech.

There did not for the moment seem the need for greeting more distinct, and half-unconsciously his mind employed itself with the impression of her that came to him through his eyes. She was different from what he remembered her to be as he had seen her last, and yet so like, that he was puzzled to determine quite wherein the difference lay.

Her figure was less girlish, as Motrya had said, and she arranged her hair now in a different way. But he decided that the thing that counted was the unremembered expression of her eyes. They were larger somehow and more grave; though he recognized that this impression was helped by the thinness of her cheeks and the firmer lines that had begun to show about her mouth.

He had associated with her, always, the fragile air of delicacy in face and carriage which is called "flower-like" in a girl, and it was a shock to him to find that this quality was no longer there. There was the same delicate transparency of skin that let the color come and go as her emotions called it up, and she had still the high, proud carriage of the head. But the frank acceptance of her world, the shy trustfulness—the innocence, perhaps—of her girlhood days had gone from her with the years and in its place he found a pathetic gravity that made her a stranger to him in a way, and gave him a twinge at heart lest in some manner he had been its cause.

"So it is you, Ivan," she said quietly. "Motrya told me you were here at the post, but I did not expect to come on you in this way." Her very voice was changed to him. It was less fresh—more colorless and placid than he remembered it to be.

"It was I who was wrong," he returned hurriedly. "I should not have come in from the rear in that unceremonious way!"

"But it was your house," she went on in the same even tone, "and you could not have known

that we were quartered here. The lieutenant gave us the place so that we might be near to Motrya and the rest. He has had your baggage transferred to his own house so he could have you near him for his work." Ivan Egorovitch flushed with surprise.

"It is a good thing for us both, then," he said thoughtfully. "It means an advance for me that I did not expect and I am glad it is to be a comfort for you."

"Thank you," she returned with the same grave sweetness. She did not smile nor waver in her expression under his curious gaze, but her eyes dropped down so that she no longer looked him in the face.

"Tell me about yourself," she said with a momentary flutter of her eyelids. "Have you been with the company all these years?"

"Not all," he answered, "but so many that the places they send me to seem most like home. When one has once broken away from the ties that hold him fast, it does not take so much to satisfy him and make him grateful for the little that he gets."

"Yes," she echoed, "one must have something, though it is not so much." He looked at

her keenly, for he could not tell whether her words were an agreement with his philosophy or a pathetic expression of her own. She remained passive under his glance, however, and after a moment went on in her measured speech.

"You have changed very little, Ivan," she said, "and yet it is a long time!" There seemed no need in this for a direct reply and he answered her with a question of his own.

"And you?" he asked softly, "have you been happy all these years?" The girl's eyes lifted till their serious gaze rested with almost solemn intentness on his face.

"Do you ask me that question, Ivan?" she demanded earnestly.

"Yes," he declared bravely. "For whatever came of it, I had no wish in my heart ever to make you sad."

"Then I will answer it," she said, "for there is nothing in it of which I am ashamed. You did not tell me when you went, you know, and not understanding, I had the anxiety and the fear,—and then I thought, too, that sometime you would come back." Her unwavering look was like an accusation and before it Ivan Egorovitch's eyes went down.

"It was not that I did not remember," he said in a low tone, "and at one time I really began the journey back!" It was not Varenka Petrovna's way to smile or make distinct expression of her emotions, but her whole face lighted with a feeling she could not conceal.

"Then you did remember!" she cried softly. "Ah, why did you not come?"

"Because," he answered, "before I reached you, the word came to me that you had given yourself to another man. Why did you do it?" he added reproachfully. "Why could you not have been content to wait?"

"I was content," she said quietly. "But it was a long time, Ivan—and you sent no word. He desired me very much and my father was uneasy always and insisted on my doing as he wished. I think he was afraid you would come back," she added slowly. There was a little thrill for Ivan Egorovitch in this confession that was a gratification to his pride.

"And are you happy now?" he asked almost under his breath. The woman's eyes met his as bravely as before.

"Yes," she said with a pathetic little rise in the voice. "He is good to me and I am as true a

wife to him, Ivan, as I would have been to you.'' She was silent for a moment, standing with lips pressed together and looking by him and away with misty eyes. Then, as if talking to herself as well as to him, she added: ''Yes, I am content—but the more so, perhaps, that I have had this talk with you to-day.'' Ivan Egorovitch watched her with a growing sense of shame.

''I am glad that you can say it,'' he said huskily. ''It would break my heart to think that through me, where I did not mean it, your life had come to wreck.''

''I have understood,'' she answered tremulously, ''and all these years I have believed.''

''I have not deserved it,'' he said humbly, ''and the only excuse I have is that it was a boy's mistake in doing what he thought was right.''

''Yes, what was right,'' she echoed vaguely, and stood with her lips drawn in between her teeth. Then she looked at him again with the smile that seemed a radiance from the whole face rather than the lips.

''That is all, I suppose,'' she said quietly, ''except that I shall see you again here at the post.''

"Would it make you happier if you did not?" he demanded earnestly. "For if so, I will go away."

"No," she returned gently. "I do not think I should wish you to do that—and even if I did, I have no right to ask it of you."

"It is not a question of right, but of what would serve to make you more content."

"You are good," she said gratefully, "but I believe it will make me no less happy to know that you are close by." She moved away from him irresolutely and then came back to him and put out her hand.

"You had better go now," she said in her even voice. "It is time that I went over to the other house." He took her hand without a word, bowed over it respectfully, and with his head in such a whirl that he scarcely knew where he stepped, picked his way through the litter of the other room and went out by the same way he had come.

Once clear of the place, he took counsel with himself what he had better do. He was disturbed by his meeting with Varenka Petrovna and at heart he found a further disappointment that on her account he must leave his quarters

near her sister and take up others where Motrya Petrovna would not be so close at hand. He decided to go at once to the lieutenant and find out why he had been quartered at his house. He thought, too, of Stepan Dmitrievitch, from whom, if the news were true, he would for the time be obliged to part. But this regret was not so strong as it would once have been, for since his blood-brother had found an interest in Motrya Petrovna, common with his own, their intercourse had been a shade less whole-souled than before.

Mikhail Etolin was at home, though it was after the hour to return to work; and going in on him without announcement, as he was used to do, Ivan Egorovitch found him spread out full length on the bed. His dinner stood untouched on the table where it had been served and he seemed like one who had forgotten hunger or had no taste for food.

At the noise of his in-coming, the lieutenant sat up. He moved with difficulty and when he had raised himself erect, Ivan Egorovitch saw that his face was without color and drawn as near to haggardness as his puffy features would permit. He was so disheveled and unkempt, so

unhappy in his look, that the young man came at once to where he sat.

"What is it, your Well-born?" he said with quick concern. "Have you been sick?" The lieutenant stirred vaguely and continued to look at him with dull eyes.

"I am not well!" he said brokenly. "It will be all right though in a little while." The young man bent above him sympathetically.

"Where is the trouble?" he said. "Perhaps I can be of use." Mikhail Sergeievitch hesitated a moment and then, reaching out, took hold of Ivan Egorovitch's hand and placed it clumsily against his breast.

"Here!" he said huskily, and the young man could feel that the heart inside was beating wildly, and fluttering like a thing gone mad.

"You are indeed ill," he said with solicitous interest, and obeying mechanically the impulse to be of help, he pushed him gently by the shoulders to lay him back upon the bed. Mikhail Sergeievitch resisted and held himself upright as he was.

"No!" he panted, "I breathe better where I am." Ivan Egorovitch stood back and looked at him in some perplexity.

"When did it happen?" he said. "Have you been this way long?"

"Only about an hour—though I felt it this morning and knew that it would come. I held it back, though," he added with a gleam of triumph, "until I got away from the people at the beach!"

"But what was it that brought it on?" The lieutenant's eyes came up searchingly to Ivan Egorovitch's face as if weighing how far he might reveal to him his heart. But he was sick and weakened by his pain and the desire to unburden himself to some sympathetic soul was too strong for the dread of ridicule which held him back.

"I was afraid!" he whispered, and looked shamefacedly at the floor.

"Afraid?"

"Yes, not of the sickness itself, for that I have had before. But how could he know—how could he tell it was coming back?"

"Who know?" demanded the young man earnestly.

"That devil of a priest!" Ivan Egorovitch crossed himself swiftly and murmured an inward prayer.

"He said it came from God!" he answered with a sudden awe-struck recollection. "But I did not believe him at the time!"

"It came, though," said Mikhail Etolin simply, and began quietly to cry. "It was the bell!" he went on miserably. "I should not have minded if it had not been for that. When he first rang it, I laughed and thought it was a joke. But when he kept on doing it, the thing stayed with me, whether I would or not. It got on my nerves to hear it going day after day, and then the heat brought back the trouble and I began to wonder whether he really knew. This morning, I felt the thing was coming and tried to fight it off—but I knew it would get me when the priest rang his bell and so I came away early to this place. It was true, too," he added gloomily. "When he rang it, I went down!"

"But, your Well-born," cried the young man earnestly, "it was your breathing, not your heart, that Simeon Gvosdef said would show the change." Moved either by the suggestion or, perhaps, by some crisis of the disease, the lieutenant's jaw dropped so that his mouth came open and he carried his hand up swiftly to his throat. His body stiffened till he was bolt up-

right and his breath began to come and go in long spasmodic gasps.

"Air!" he cried fiercely, "air!" and clutched at his face as if to tear away some physical obstruction from before his mouth.

It was only for a moment and then he went limply together and slid, a helpless heap, down to the floor. His face was purple and his breath still came in short whistling gasps. But he was not unconscious and, keeping his eyes beseechingly on Ivan Egorovitch, he continued his half-inarticulate cry for help.

The young man recovered from his fright and, seizing him by the arms, dragged him unceremoniously across the room to the open door. There, on his back, with his head across the threshold, he let him rest, and taking a fan he knelt beside him and swung it to keep the air moving evenly across his face. The crisis passed almost as quickly as it had come, but it left the lieutenant so weak it was some time before he was able to sit up. When he did, his first thought was to relieve his fear.

"The priest—" he whispered, as Ivan Egorovitch held him up. "Was any one here to see?"

"Not a soul," replied the young man reas-

suringly. Mikhail Etolin gave a long sigh of relief.

"That is good," he said faintly. "They must never know!" Ivan Egorovitch got him back into his bed and poured out for him a little brandy in a cup. The lieutenant was too exhausted to remain steadily awake, but more than once his mind came back to the advantage of keeping his sickness a secret from the camp.

"We will fool the priest yet!" he cried excitedly. "You see now why I had need to have you with me in the house."

After a time he went more comfortably to sleep and his attendant, sitting idly by, found life growing heavy on his hands. It had been a strenuous day and the unusual emotion of it weighed him down. He remembered, too, that he had eaten nothing since the morning and, going noiselessly to the table, he selected for himself some food. But at the best it was lonely work and he yearned for something that would bring it to an end.

The men came back from work and he watched the wind bend the smoke of their supper-fires above the various roofs. Then he found concern lest Mikhail Etolin should hear and waken

when Simeon Gvosdef rang his evening bell. He closed the door and stood outside to listen for the sound. But when it came it was from a distance somewhere on the bay and so low that in his closed chamber the sleeper could be trusted not to hear.

It was a gleam of comfort to him to feel that the priest's insidious suggestion for once, at least, had failed of its effect. Then suddenly he found another pleasant thrill, for on the lower ground along the shore he caught a glimpse of a girlish figure clad in a soft gray dress and outlined clearly against the blue water of the bay. He recognized it with delight and instantly a resolve grew in his mind. Warning the cook that he should not disturb Mikhail Etolin in his sleep, he left the house behind him and ran lightly down the path. Before he caught up with her he sought, she was well along the beach.

"Motrya," he called sharply, and she stopped and turned around.

"Have you run away, too?" he demanded breathlessly as he came to where she stood. She looked at him brightly and answered with a laugh.

"I suppose it was running away," she said, "though I had not thought of it as such. I had been in the house all day and wanted to get out."

"It was the same with me," he answered gleefully. "Why should we not run away together? It is so much more fun than doing it alone." She caught the infection of his gaiety and clapped her hands as if she were still a child.

"Where shall we go?" she cried delightedly. Ivan Egorovitch thought quickly over the possibilities at hand.

"It is nearly three hours yet to sunset," he said promptly, "and the tide is nearly full. Let us take the canoe and go down the channel. I will show you the draw and you can pick the flowers that I have been promising you from the time you came ashore."

"Good!" she returned, "only I have no hat and you must surely get me back here before dark." They turned back to the landing and out along the little causeway to the selected boat. The young man drew it along the rocky edge and held it firmly while she took her seat.

"Now do not move," he cautioned as he knelt

in his own place. She watched him with eager interest as he pushed off the flimsy craft and began to increase the power of his stroke. The bay was absolutely still and Ivan Egorovitch, watching the girl as she sat facing him in the bow, was moved to paddle fast, that the wind caused by the motion should ruffle up her hair. She had never before been in so slight a craft and was disturbed by the swift movement underneath her feet.

"It is like flying," she said, gripping the edges convulsively on either side. "I like it while it is smooth, but, even with you, I think I should be afraid when it was not."

"It is always smooth," replied the young man reassuringly. "I have been here two summers now and have never yet seen a wave worth noting on the bay." She was not sorry, though, when the channel had been threaded and they came to the little landing at the point. She remained quiet while he tied the boat and drew it as close as could be to the shore.

"Stand up," he said authoritatively, and she rose unsteadily to her feet. He reached her his hand as she took a first step forward. Then, as the little craft moved treacherously beneath

her, she lost her head, and with a little gasp lunged forward and caught him nervously about the neck. He lifted her with a straightening of the shoulders and stepped quickly back, and the canoe, freed of its burden, ran smoothly out till it hung dancing at its tether's end.

Ivan Egorovitch turned with the girl in his arms and, instead of setting her down, went with her up the winding path that led to the summit of the cliff. She made no objection till the top was reached. Then she lowered her arms and pushed away from him.

"That will do," she said warningly. "Please let me down." He obeyed at once and set her gently on the grass.

"You were too quick," he said when he could get his breath. "It does not do to move so suddenly in a canoe." But Motrya Petrovna had got her eyes on the flowers and with a little cry was out among them, moving swiftly here and there. She was like one intoxicated with delight and went from one sort to another, examining and gathering with almost jealous haste. Ivan Egorovitch watched her with a smile and waited contentedly until her erratic wanderings brought her back again to where he

stood. Her hair was blown into disorder and he could scarcely see her face above the armful of her flowers.

"Do you expect to take all those things home with you?" he asked in good-natured raillery. "If so, I shall have to get a bigger boat."

"I shall not leave one," she answered scornfully, "and to-morrow I am coming back to get the rest!"

"Lay them here, though, for the present," he continued. "You can get them again when you have seen the draw." She arranged them carefully under a convenient bush and followed him across the little meadow for perhaps a hundred yards. There, at the edge of the cliff along the channel, he came to a final stop.

"Look down," he said, and steadied her by holding to her arm. Just above the water and some forty feet below, she saw there was a narrow level shelf.

"I am going to take you down there," he said, "and you will see something you never saw before." She weighed the thing with some misgiving in her mind but followed him submissively when he began the descent. It was a narrow path, but safe, and at first she found no

reason for alarm. But half-way down, it skirted dizzily around a rocky point and here a sudden panic seized her and she stopped and closed her eyes. He turned at once and, stepping between her and the descent, he swept her firmly back against the rock. She clung to him and he waited until she should regain her self-control.

"Were you afraid?" he whispered quizzically. She gave her head a decided shake but did not open her eyes.

"It is the last turn," he said consolingly. "Come, I will help you till you get around." He put his arm around her and held her for the going, tightly pressed against the cliff. When they were down, he found a place for her with her back against the rock, and threw himself beside her on the ground. She was still for a moment, and then her hand went out and slid confidingly into his.

"I was afraid, Ivan," she whispered guiltily. "It seemed as if the path led right off into the sea." He laughed contentedly and patted affectionately the hand that lay in his.

"And yet you are here all safe," he said with pretended wonder. "Isn't it fine to have both

the thrill and the escape!" Her color was coming back and she smiled up at him happily.

"What was it you brought me down here to see?" she asked.

"The draw," he said, getting nimbly to his feet. "Wait here for a moment till I go and get the rope." He was away from her and climbing up the cliff before she was fairly conscious what he had said. She raised herself and looked after him in some dismay, but accepted his defection in the spirit he had urged and set herself to wait for his return. The coming was not long delayed, and when he appeared around the point of rock, she saw that he had a coil of rope and a good-sized log of wood.

"My! but you make me trouble!" he panted as he laid them at her feet. "I have run all the way back here from the boat."

"Why, I did not want them!" she cried in astonishment.

"Oh yes, you did," he answered lightly, "only you did not know it until now. I am going to use them to show you the working of the draw. I ran for fear I should not get here in time." He was knotting one end of the cord to the billet as he spoke, and fastened the other securely

around a jutting point of rock. Then, lifting the log, he threw it as far as he could out into the stream.

It lay quite still after the splash and he eased the long rope down into the water so the float might be free to move which way it would. At first, there was no definite advance, but soon it could be seen that it was moving slowly up the channel toward the bay. Ivan Egorovitch nodded vigorously in satisfaction as he saw it start.

"I am in time," he said. "It is going toward the east. That means the tide is not yet full." The girl leaned forward and watched the moving billet curiously.

"I do not see that it is doing anything strange," she said. "When is it going to begin?"

"Almost at once. Do not think about it for the moment, but watch that line of water over by the other shore." She did as she was bid and saw that opposite them in the channel some strange disturbance of the surface had begun. Instead of the former smoothness, stirred only by the running of the tide, there was now a well-defined patch of choppy water, where the waves

rose and fell sharply, as if troubled by some unseen force, and around this the whole channel began to stir and move uneasily in wider, longer swells. There was something so unusual and sinister in its development and growth that the girl watched it with absorbed interest and unconsciously moved back closer to the wall of rock. She saw nothing else till her companion touched her and pointed with his hand.

"Look at the billet, now," he said quietly. She turned her head so as to bring the log again within her gaze, and saw that instead of floating idly as before at the end of the taut rope, it had turned back on its course and was moving slowly but steadily toward the spot of foam on the other side. It struggled and pulled like a sentient thing and when it had swept round the wide radius of the cord and reached the farthermost limit, it continued to strain against its tether as if it were alive.

"Come and draw it in," said the young man, reaching out his hand. "I want you to see how strongly the water pulls." He raised her to her feet and went with her to where the rope was tied. She took hold of it with both hands and pulled gently at first, and then with all her

strength. The rope stiffened and raised up, but the billet did not move.

"It is because you do not know how," he said, to ease her failure. "You should give a quick jerk like this." Bracing his feet, he threw his whole weight suddenly back on the rope. The billet stopped its dancing and began to move responsively toward the shore. But the girl's mind was on the thing itself, rather than the way.

"It is strong enough!" she said with a shudder. "What would happen if we were out there in the canoe?"

"I will show you," he answered, "when I have drawn this in." He brought the log ashore and, untying the rope, he threw the loosened billet back into the sea. It caught the impulse of the whirlpool from the time that it was launched and moved evenly out with a wide, swinging curve toward the point from which it had just been pulled. The girl watched it with a fearful interest and when it began to quicken in its speed she moved closer to Ivan Egorovitch and slipped her hand timidly beneath his arm.

The billet reached the patch of angry water and for a moment seemed to pause. Dipping

toward the center so that the rear end rose above the foam, it waved uneasily from side to side and then with a swift plunge went under out of sight. The girl's tense grasp relaxed and she took a long, deep breath.

"Where has it gone?" she whispered.

"There is no one knows," he answered. "Of all who have been drawn down, not one has ever come back to tell."

"Then there have been—men?"

"Yes, men and boats. There were those Frenchmen, you know, who are buried on the island. So far, this year, but one hunter has been caught, but last year we lost two." She shivered slightly and he put his arm around her and drew her closely to his side.

"I would not like to die like that," she said appealingly, and leaned against him as if he were a safeguard from the danger that threatened so near her in the sea. They stood silent for some time, he with his thought on her, and she letting her imagination dwell fearfully on the pitiful tragedies of the spot. Then, with a lover's obliviousness to time and place, he bent above her till his cheek was almost against her hair.

"I love you—do you know it?" he whispered earnestly. She looked up at him suddenly and as quickly let her lids go down.

"I have been told so," she said demurely, and kept her eyes on the ground. He laughed in spite of his vexation that her answer was not what he wished.

"I know now," he went on eagerly, "why it was that we were both uneasy this afternoon and felt that we must get away. It was because it was the first time since your coming that we had not seen each other all day long." She considered a moment before she made reply.

"Perhaps," she said doubtfully, "but I did not know it at the time." Her gaze went wandering out across the channel and before he could make answer, she moved suddenly back from him and stood looking intently eastward toward the post.

"Ivan!" she said sharply, "did you not say that at this time it is not safe for any one to cross the draw?"

"Yes," he responded. "Why?"

"Then what is that man doing, coming this way in a boat?" He looked in the direction she pointed and saw that a canoe with one

man in it had come into view, moving out from the inner bay. He was all excitement in a moment and went rapidly toward the new-comer as far as he could go along the ledge.

"I can not understand," he said slowly, "unless the man has made a mistake about the tide." Motrya Petrovna had followed close behind him, but he seemed to forget her presence and stood with his eyes riveted on the approaching boat till he could distinguish the identity of the man within.

"It is the mad priest!" he exclaimed helplessly. "It may be that he does not know!" Putting his hands to his lips he shouted lustily a warning to the unsuspecting man.

"Go back!" he cried, and waved his hands in the direction of the post. The priest did not seem to understand and paid no attention to the warning beyond changing his course slightly as if to come to where they stood. Ivan Egorovitch continued to gesticulate and shout, until by the unsteady wavering of the canoe he saw that it was beginning to feel the grapple of the draw.

"The fool!" he burst out angrily and ran rapidly along the ledge to where he had left

the rope. Throwing off his coat and boots, he began with feverish haste to tie the free end of the cord about his waist. Motrya Petrovna watched him with horror in her face.

"Ivan!" she demanded fearfully, "Ivan! What are you going to do?" He did not even look at her, but kept his eyes fixed on the movements of the boat.

"I am going to try to reach him before the current gets too strong a hold," he said mechanically. The girl moved quickly between him and the water and threw herself impulsively upon him, clasping both her arms around his neck.

"You shall not!" she cried sharply. "I can not bear it. I will not let you go!" He did not dare to take his eyes from the channel lest he should miss the proper time to start, and, without looking at her, he unclasped her arms and set her gently to one side.

"Do not be afraid, dear," he said soberly. "I can reach him without danger and at the worst you will only have to pull me in by the rope."

The canoe was now quite near, but the current had begun to draw it appreciably away

from them to the other side. Ivan Egorovitch stood holding Motrya Petrovna at arm's length till he judged the best moment had arrived. Then he turned for an instant to her and caught her by the hands.

"Good-by, dear," he said simply, and let himself down gently into the sea. The girl stood with her hands clasped convulsively before her and watched his black head as it moved away from her through the waves. Like a sudden vision there stood revealed to her all that it would mean if he should not come back, and she began to comprehend how much she leaned on his regard.

"Ivan!" she called, "Ivan!" and when there was no answer she burst into tears.

"I can not bear it," she cried miserably, and resolutely shut her eyes, but in a moment she opened them again and turned tremblingly to look. The current had been with the swimmer and he had easily overhauled the drifting boat. He could not hope to clamber into the tiny craft and Motrya Petrovna could see that he was talking excitedly with the priest and lifting on the rope as if to show him what to do.

Simeon Gvosdef, however, seemed not to take

the rescue in good part. He pushed the swimmer from him with his hands and once he raised a hand as if to strike. The pull of the water increased as the boat drifted nearer to the center whirl, and the rope grew so taut that it was beyond Ivan Egorovitch's strength to hold back against the growing strain. He made one final effort to lift the rope above the bow of the canoe and, failing, raised himself suddenly at one side and with a swift use of his weight, upset the boat and turned the priest out unexpectedly into the sea.

There was a frightened cry from Simeon Gvosdef, and the girl saw that Ivan Egorovitch had grappled with the floundering man and was seeking to push him before him to the shore. It was a difficult task, for the suck of the draw was strong and the priest had completely lost his head, so that he struggled wildly all the time. She looked for the canoe, but it had drifted to the center and was gone.

With eager wish to help, Motrya Petrovna seized on the rope and drew it in cautiously till she could feel the drag of the living bodies on the other end. She put her weight against it and held back and felt with a keen thrill of

The girl saw that Ivan had grappled with the floundering man

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delight that her added strength was enough to turn the tide in favor of the swimmers and that they were moving perceptibly toward shore.

So far, Ivan Egorovitch had succeeded in keeping Simeon Gvosdef before him so that he could not interfere. He had his hand firmly in the priest's hair and kept him at arm's length in front, but holding him so that his ghastly face was, for the most part, outside in the air.

But half-way to the shore the priest's hand came in contact with the rope. It gave him an unexpected hold, and in an instant he had pulled himself around and wound his arms about his rescuer in a close, convulsive grip. Ivan Egorovitch struggled wildly to throw off the clutch and, failing, lifted his one free arm and struck the priest blindly with it in the face.

Simeon Gvosdef's head went back with a snap, but his hold was unconscious and could not thus be made to yield. There was a momentary struggle between the two men and a wild beating of the sea. Then, without a word or sign, they both went down and the water closed bubblingly above their heads.

The girl cried out as she saw them disappear

and pulled with superhuman strength on the rope. They came up promptly like corks, and before they went down again she saw that the priest's arms and legs were wound around Ivan Egorovitch so tightly that he could no longer swim. Her eyes were so full of tears she could scarcely see and her breath came in dry, racking sobs. But she did not cease to pull on the rope, though she felt herself turn faint each time they went out of sight. Though only a few moments, it seemed an hour to her before the task was done and she had the bodies close against the ledge.

She could not lift them, now that they were there, but farther on there was a second ledge that shelved down gradually till it was covered by the sea. To this she brought them and with great pains got them up till they rested fairly on the stone. Both were unconscious, but not dead, and Simeon Gvosdef's resistance was but feeble when she set herself to make him loose his hold.

She left him where he was, except that she rolled him over on his face with his head on lower ground. But Ivan Egorovitch she tugged and pulled until she got him to the broader

ledge. She had little knowledge of what was best to do, but she dried his face and smoothed his hair, and rubbed and kneaded him till the life came back and the color slowly gathered in his lips.

"Ivan!" she cried, "Ivan!" and shook him to drive the impression in. He stirred uneasily and opened his eyes. The movement was unconscious and, with a flutter of his eyelids, he let them down again and lay impassive as before.

But to Motrya Petrovna the action brought the liveliest thrill of joy. She lifted him by the shoulders till he was half-way in her lap, and gathering his head in her arms she held it close against her breast. Her face went down till it was touching his, and she rocked him backward and forward, as a mother might a child.

"I love you," she said softly, though she knew he did not hear. "I can not wait, Ivan. I want to tell you now. You know I said I had never had the feeling, and truly I did not till to-day. But when I saw you out there in the water it came to me like a flash of light. There is no doubt about it any more, Ivan, for I know now—I know!"

CHAPTER VIII

VARENKA BECOMES ROMANTIC

The sun was almost down before help came to Motrya Petrovna and the two shipwrecked men. Then a passing canoe, manned by natives, responded to her call and carried the forlorn party in safety to the post. The heart went out of the girl with the passing of her terror and suspense, and she was almost as limp as the other two when they got her to the camp. The priest was delirious and went unconscious to his bed, but Ivan Egorovitch regained his senses, though he could not walk when he first got ashore. He saw to it that Motrya Petrovna was sent home with proper care and then had himself taken to Mikhail Etolin's house.

The news of the affair spread in wild rumors through the little camp, and Ivan Egorovitch was hardly in dry clothes when Stepan Dmitrievitch came anxiously to the house and asked for him. When he saw Ivan Egorovitch sitting on

the edge of the bed, clothed and in his right mind he made a dash at him with a great shout.

"Then you are not dead!" he cried gleefully and caught him tightly in his arms. Ivan Egorovitch winced at the embrace, though his face lighted up with pleasure that his foster-brother should so care.

"Easy, man, easy!" he cried entreatingly. "Every muscle in my body is as tender as a boil. And if you make a noise like that you will waken the lieutenant and he will have you put outside." Stepan Dmitrievitch sheepishly let go his hold, and seated himself on the bed beside Ivan Egorovitch. He could not yet, however, rid himself of the affectionate solicitude for his blood-brother, which his thought of him in peril had so unexpectedly aroused, and began feeling him all over cautiously with his hands as if to assure himself that in the accident no pieces had been lost.

"No bones broken?" he said inquiringly.

"No. Only the soreness, and a feeling as if there was too much water in the hold." Stepan Dmitrievitch gave a nod of satisfaction.

"That is not bad," he said, "for a man who has been in the great draw."

"Why, I could not possibly have got hurt!" interrupted Ivan Egorovitch.

"You are the only man who has ever come out of it alive," returned the other dryly. "Tell me about it. I only heard that you were dead."

"Why, I was not even in danger," said Ivan Egorovitch scornfully. "Simeon Gvosdef was drifting and I went out to him on the end of a rope. When I got him, Motrya Petrovna pulled us in." A shade passed over Stepan Dmitrievitch's face and he spoke with some surprise.

"Motrya Petrovna?" he said. "Was she out there with you on the ledge?" Ivan Egorovitch caught the difference in his tone and looked quickly round at him.

"Why, yes," he answered, "I took her out to see the draw." Stepan Dmitrievitch considered for a moment and looked thoughtfully down at his feet.

"Was there any one else with her?" he asked slowly.

"No."

"You ought not to have done it," he said deprecatingly. "It was not a place to take her to alone." Ivan Egorovitch's eyes twinkled and he patted his blood-brother softly on the back.

"What would you have done if you had been in my shoes?" he asked significantly. Then, as if, after all, the thing might rightfully demand a reason, he added apologetically, "You know that I have been going with Motrya Petrovna, anywhere and everywhere, since she was a little girl."

"That is it!" burst out Stepan Dmitrievitch resentfully. "You treat her as if she were still a child and practise a childish familiarity with her, while all the time you are thinking of her in an entirely different way."

"What way?"

"You know as well as I do,—and it is not at all the relation of being a brother to her that you have in mind!" Ivan Egorovitch flushed responsively, but he did not let his feelings overthrow his calm.

"Stepan," he said coaxingly, "you came here to-night to see me and not to talk about other things."

"I know it," replied the other doggedly, "but I have been thinking about this a long time, and now that we have got to it, I believe we had better thresh it out." He paused and waited in aggressive silence and Ivan Egoro-

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vitch, with a little sigh of acquiescence, surrendered himself to his mood.

"I do not see, though, what there is to make so much of," he suggested plaintively. "The girl does not belong to you!"

"Nor to you!" retorted Stepan Dmitrievitch shortly. "But you act as if you already had her in your hand." Ivan Egorovitch could not resist the chance to make a point.

"Perhaps I have!" he said softly, and bent forward so that his blood-brother could not see his face. Stepan Dmitrievitch's face fell and he rose abruptly to his feet.

"If that is true, it settles the whole matter," he said huskily, "and I shall have no more to say." He went moodily across the room and stood gazing out of the window into the dusk, while he regained his self-control. Ivan Egorovitch watched him with a look of mingled amusement and regret. He made an effort to get up and follow him, but found himself still too unsteady on his legs.

"Come back here," he said, "and listen to reason. I did not say that I have her."

Stepan Dmitrievitch turned and looked at him uncertainly, as if trying to decide in his slower

brain how far the overture was sincere. Then he came back to Ivan Egorovitch's bed and stood in front of him.

"Tell me the truth!" he cried. "Does she love you—has she told you that she does?"

"I hope she loves me, God bless her!" said Ivan Egorovitch, "though she has never yet admitted it in words. I suspect she is so young she does not know what love is when she feels it."

"She knows it well enough," said Stepan Dmitrievitch grimly, and it was Ivan Egorovitch's turn to look up in surprise. For some moments he studied his blood-brother's face curiously as if to gage the particularity of his knowledge of Motrya Petrovna's heart. He was too sure of himself and her, however, to be troubled long, and with a shake of his head as if to clear the matter from his brain, he seized hold of Stepan Dmitrievitch and drew him down beside him on the bed.

"Come here," he said, "and talk this matter over as a Christian should." Stepan Dmitrievitch allowed himself to be beguiled, but sat in dignified silence and waited for the other to begin.

"It is hard for both of us," said Ivan Egorovitch after a moment's thought. "I know you love Motrya Petrovna and I believe I love her just as well as you. She is the first thing we have both wanted that we can not properly divide. We can not both have her, and the only way out that I can see is to play fair until she makes up her mind which one of us she wants and agree that the loser shall abide gracefully by her decision when it comes."

"But you have not been playing fair!" said Stepan Dmitrievitch impatiently.

"Yes, I have," returned Ivan Egorovitch earnestly. "I can not help it that I knew her as a child and have her trust—and, for that matter, the hardest thing I have to meet is that she has come to treat me so entirely as a brother that I can not persuade her to think of me as anything else." Stepan Dmitrievitch softened visibly and put out his hand.

"We have been very close to each other, Ivan," he said with a show of affection. "So close that we ought not now to quarrel about a girl. I want her if I can get her and I shall try. But I shall also try not to be jealous of you again and, if I can not have her, there is

no one I would rather see her go to than to you."

"It is my thought, too," said Ivan Egorovitch soberly, "and I shall not grudge her to you, if she will not come to me." They clasped hands honestly on the bond, and Stepan Dmitrievitch's face cleared of its shadowy cloud. Ivan Egorovitch was tired and showed it in his look. His blood-brother saw it and took his case in hand.

"You must go to bed," he said authoritatively. "I have let you talk too much!" Ivan Egorovitch made no demur and allowed himself to be settled for the night. Stepan Dmitrievitch saw that he had proper covers and was comfortably placed, and when the thing was finished and there was nothing more to do, before he left the place he stooped and kissed him on both cheeks.

Mikhail Sergeievitch had failed to waken either when Stepan Dmitrievitch came or when he went, and so it happened that he alone of all the camp remained untold of what had happened at the draw. He slept well on toward morning, and when he opened his eyes, the long rest had worked its miracle with him and possessed

him with the feeling that his trouble had abated and that he was no longer dominated by his disease.

His heart was beating regularly and slowly and his throat felt hollow, so that at will he drew in long, satisfactory breaths. He tested these things cautiously and even lifted himself to try his strength. But there was enough of weakness in him to keep alive the embers of his fear, and he could not entirely get out of his mind the conviction that the change was a respite only and not a permanent relief.

"Damn the priest!" he said under his breath. "If it were not for him, I might get well!" The impulse, however, was not in him to get up, and turning on his side he lay and listened to the sounds of his awakening world. Through the window he could see that the day was clear and about the casement there was a confusing chatter of small birds. He heard the cook get up and make his fire, and found an interest in the cheerful rattle of the dishes as he worked.

From the world beyond there came no sound, save an occasional shout from the men and the barking of the dogs as they were fed or harnessed to the sleds. He let these things drift

idly through his mind and was beginning to feel impatience that his breakfast was not yet at hand, when suddenly he became conscious that something he had been accustomed to, as a part of the usual morning routine, had somehow been left out.

He could not think for the moment what the lacking detail was, but the sense of difference intruded itself steadily after he had once thought of it, and would not be set aside. He pondered on it vaguely, checking off in his mind the different things to which he had been used; and then as suddenly it came to him in explanation that, though it was long after six o'clock, Simeon Gvosdef had not yet rung his bell.

He sat bolt upright when he thought of it and listened eagerly to every sound. He knew that he had been awake at the accustomed hour, and it gave him a wild thrill to think that the priest had for once forgotten the warning peal. It put a heart into him he had not felt for days and he hastened to make sure that he had made no mistake. He called aloud and was answered by the cook. The man came in hurriedly, carrying in his hand a bowl which, with an air of apology, he set down on a table by the bed.

"Here is your tea, your Well-born," he said with a deferential bow. "The remainder of your breakfast is not ready yet, but it will not be long delayed." The lieutenant did not seem to notice his confusion or that his meal had not been promptly served.

"What time is it?" he demanded eagerly.

"It is after seven, your Well-born, but the fire was very slow." Mikhail Etolin knew now that he had made no mistake and there rose up within him an elation that gave him an almost irresistible desire to cry out.

"Well, well," he said graciously, "there is no harm done. Send Ivan Egorovitch to me at once and bring me the breakfast whenever it is cooked." The man did not go, but stood first on one foot and then on the other, and Mikhail Sergeievitch saw that he was not at ease.

"I am afraid, your Well-born, that Ivan Egorovitch can not come," he said respectfully. "He was asleep when I came in and I do not even know if he is well enough to leave his bed."

"Why, what has happened to him?"

"It was the accident. Assuredly your Well-born will have heard!"

"I have heard nothing," he cried testily. "Go on and tell me what you know." The man was pleased with his sudden access of importance, and gave the story with full picturesqueness of detail. The lieutenant listened closely and in the description of the final condition of those concerned found ground for a sudden hope. "The priest then—" he interrupted. "Is he already dead?"

"Not dead, your Well-born, but very near to death."

"Too bad," said the lieutenant regretfully. Then, looking around the room, he motioned with his hand. "Bring me my clothes here," he said. "I believe I shall get up." An hour later he came in on Ivan Egorovitch and found him just finishing his morning meal.

"You did well in a way, my boy," he said wheezily. "This morning that devil of a priest was too sick to ring his bell. But when you saw out there that his Master was set to take him, why did you not let him go?" There was a real mournfulness in his tone and he looked at Ivan Egorovitch so reproachfully that the young man laughed.

"It came so suddenly, Mikhail Sergeievitch,"

he said in humorous apology, "that it never occurred to me that in saving him I was interfering with the Lord!"

"It was blasphemy! It was the unpardonable sin!" burst out the lieutenant resentfully. "And the worst of it is that I shall have to suffer for it—and not you!"

"Well, at any rate, give me credit for bringing you the temporary relief."

"Yes—if it lasts!" responded the lieutenant with a sigh. He ambled over to the door, and stopped meditatively with his hand on the latch.

"I am decent enough in most things," he said with a little air of shame, "but if I were to tell you the truth that is really in my heart, I should have to say that I am honestly sorry that you did not let him drown!"

After the lieutenant's departure, Ivan Egorovitch found it no easy task to stay cooped up at home. He settled himself as best he might to spend the day in bed, but by ten o'clock his inclination got the better of his prudence and he dressed himself and made ready to go out.

"I will go and see Motrya," he said to himself. "Stepan shall not even have the advantage of a day." He was still lame and weak

and his progress was difficult and slow. By stopping now and then to rest, however, the distance was accomplished without break; but when he arrived, his distress was very evident.

Motrya Petrovna was not there, but her sister and Tatiana Vassilievna sat at work just within the door of the latter's house. The older woman was busy looking over a basket of dried pease, preparatory to their being cooked, and Varenka Petrovna had a cloth and needle in her hands so that she might have at least the appearance of occupation.

When they saw him, both women rose up with exclamations of surprise. The young man was almost too tired to smile and, after one look, Tatiana Vassilievna laid hold on him with both hands and drew him carefully inside. Under her direction, Varenka Petrovna pulled forward a mattress along the raised platform at the side, and Tatiana Vassilievna pushed him down on it and covered him with rugs.

"Now," she said severely, blowing out her cheeks, "what are you here for, anyway? You ought to be at home."

"Motrya—" returned the young man weakly. "I thought perhaps I might see her if I came."

"That you can not!" declared Tatiana Vassilievna promptly. "Your slow-moving brother was here this morning on the same errand before he went to work. He stood around like a gloomy owl when I refused him, but he gave it up and went away, as I told him he would!"

"Motrya has not yet recovered from the shock," volunteered Varenka Petrovna gravely. "She is asleep now, over at the other house." Ivan Egorovitch turned again to Tatiana Vassilievna with his most ingratiating air.

"But you will let me see her when she wakes?" he persisted. Tatiana Vassilievna's features remained severely fixed and her determination seemed as rigid as before.

"How many berries do you think you are entitled to gather from my bush," she said loftily, "after treating me to such a fright about my girl?" The young man grinned sheepishly and let his eyes go down as if abashed.

"I do not seem to have pleased anybody in this business," he said plaintively. "Stepan Dmitrievitch lectured me last night, the lieutenant took a turn at it this morning, and now you will not let me see Motrya because, when it was over, you had an unexpected fright!" Varenka

looked at him with ready sympathy, but Tatiana Vassilievna deliberately brushed his plea aside.

"I suppose Mikhail Sergeievitch would have had you let the man go and drown," she said severely. The young man shrugged his shoulders quizzically.

"From what he said," he answered, "I suspect he would have been able to control his grief if I had not got out to him in time."

"I am glad you did," said the older woman impetuously, "if only that he should not get his wish!" Varenka Petrovna had let her work drop into her lap and was looking at him thoughtfully.

"I am afraid, Ivan," she said, "that there is at least one more reckoning for you yet to come." The young man turned to her in surprise.

"With whom?"

"With the priest. Are you sure that he took the rescue in good part?" Ivan Egorovitch considered the matter quickly in his mind.

"No," he said, "I am sure, rather, that he did not. He thought that I was trying to drown him when I overturned the boat."

"Then you must have a care," she went on

earnestly. "You know how vindictive he has been toward Mikhail Sergeievitch because he thinks that he killed his son." Tatiana Vassilievna had finished with her pease and, gathering up the things she had been using, she retired with them to the other room. Varenka Petrovna waited till she was well out of sight and then leaned forward to Ivan Egorovitch and put out her hand.

"I wanted to tell you, Ivan," she said, "that I am glad you went out there and helped the priest. It was a brave thing!" The young man flushed with confusion at the unexpected commendation.

"It is sweet to hear you say so," he replied gratefully. "But the real credit belongs not to me, but to Motrya. It was she who saved us both."

"But the impulse came from you. She only did as she was bid."

"That is true. But it was her strength and not my planning that drew us back to shore." Varenka Petrovna sighed.

"Motrya is so young," she said, "that even yet I can not understand where she got the strength. I can not think of her as anything

but a child." Ivan Egorovitch looked up at her with a smile.

"She is seventeen," he said.

"I know," she answered, "but that seems very young."

"Why," said the young man thoughtlessly, "it is no younger than you were when—" He stopped in some confusion and she quietly took up the word.

"Yes, that is true," she said under her breath, "but it was different then." Tatiana Vassilievna put her head in at the door and called to Varenka Petrovna.

"Come and help me with the baby," she said. "I want to get him washed before I start in on the work for noon."

"But there will be no one to talk to Ivan Egorovitch," objected the younger matron.

"Ivan Egorovitch can go to sleep. It will do him good." Varenka Petrovna looked at him doubtfully.

"If I do," asked the young man boldly, "will you let me see Motrya Petrovna when I wake again?" Tatiana Vassilievna gave him a look of mock despair.

"He has nothing else in his mind!" she said

with a shake of her head. "You go to sleep now and afterwards we will see." Varenka Petrovna rose and laid aside her work. But before she went, she straightened the covers and arranged the pillows under the young man's head.

"There," she said, "you shall be comfortable at least, and I will look in now and then to see that you are all right." She went out into the other room and he was left alone. But he was not unhappy, for there remained behind her and lingered in the place the comfort of her kindliness and the remembered pleasure of her touch. He lay back on his pillow and contentedly closed his eyes. She had given him a feminine care he had not experienced for years and he gave himself up to the delicious recollection of it with a lazy satisfaction. He let his eyes stay closed, though the impulse was not in him really to go to sleep. The air was warm and pleasant and he could hear the low talk of the women and the splashing of the baby in his tub.

True to her promise, in about ten minutes, Varenka Petrovna came back to see how he had fared. He did not stir or open his eyes and

she came over to him and lingered for a moment, looking down. He felt her fingers move about his face and she lightly lifted a stray lock of hair from his forehead and laid it gently back. Then she went away, and he found himself again alone.

"He did go to sleep," he heard her say as she went into the other room, and he smiled happily to himself. There was a genuine pleasure in thus having her come and minister to his need—but it was a pleasure purely innocent in its thought, one that did not at any point reflect on his loyalty to the girl he loved. The subdued chatter went on in the kitchen for a time as before, and he really felt himself begin to doze. But finally there was a lull in the women's talk and a momentary quiet and then he heard footsteps once more at the door.

It was Varenka Petrovna, and through his half-closed eyes he saw that she carried her hat and other things and guessed that she was on her way home. She shut the door behind her as she came in and, with simply an inquiring look in his direction, passed on across the floor. He thought she was gone, but at the outer door she paused again as if in sudden thought

and stood gazing at him irresolutely with her lips drawn in between her teeth. Then, with a sudden look behind her, she made up her mind to go to him again, and tiptoed over swiftly to his bed. His eyes shut promptly and he waited curiously to see what she would do. There was a moment's pause, when he heard no longer the rustle of her dress and knew she was standing by his side. Then with a touch as light as thistle-down, he felt her fingers laid cautiously on his lips.

The contact startled him somewhat, but if for no other reason than that she might not know that he was fooling her, he held himself resolutely in check and kept the semblance of his acting good. Having satisfied herself that he was really asleep and that the venture she desired could be safely made, Varenka Petrovna bent above him lightly till he felt her warm breath pass across his cheek and for an instant her lips lay tremblingly on his.

"Good-by," she breathed, and the words were so low he scarcely heard. He forced himself still to breathe regularly and slowly, but as she raised herself again he was conscious that a tell-tale color was flooding all his neck and face.

She did not notice it, however, for before she had time to stand erect there was a sudden noise in the room and he heard her give a quick cry of dismay. His eyes came open instantly and centered on her face. She was standing near him still, with her hands clasped helplessly in front of her and her face crimsoned by a growing flush of shame. Her eyes were fixed on something beyond him which had evidently disturbed her calm and, following her glance, he saw that Peter Efimovitch had unexpectedly come in and was standing looking at them, just inside the door.

CHAPTER IX

THE WOOING OF MOTRYA

Though brought to the result by widely differing moods, the effect, on Varenka Petrovna and the two men alike, was to hold them for the moment silent where they were. The woman's eyes were fixed on her father's face with the intent watchfulness of a frightened thing brought unexpectedly to bay, and her color came and went in sudden changes as she ran the gamut of her fears.

Peter Efimovitch made no sign, but his glance traveled suspiciously from Varenka Petrovna to the young man and back again, as if to gage from their confusion the measure of their guilt. Ivan Egorovitch, sure that he had had no predetermined part in the indiscretion of the girl, found within him no consciousness of wrongdoing and only felt dismay that this retribution should have come to her for a lapse so innocent of guile.

Peter Efimovitch was the first to move. He stepped forward into the room and, looking at his daughter, motioned toward the doorway with his hand. The girl understood, and, with a glance of shame at Ivan Egorovitch, put down her head so they should not see her face and went swiftly out. Peter Efimovitch watched till she was well away, and then turned accusingly to the young man.

"So you are at your old tricks again!" he said dryly. There was a covert sneer in his tone, but his upper lip trembled as he spoke and Ivan Egorovitch guessed that behind his bitterness of tone was the gnawing fear of family disgrace. He threw off the covers that the women had arranged about him and sat up on the platform's edge.

"What do you mean by that, Peter Efimovitch?" he demanded sharply, and there was a note of challenge in his voice. The older man did not immediately reply and, though he continued to look at Ivan Egorovitch as steadily as before, his emotions so overcame him that he could not trust himself to speak.

"Why did you do that?" he cried when he could again control his voice. "Why could you

not let her go?" He was so unhappy that the young man could not but sympathize with his distress.

"I have done nothing, Peter Efimovitch," he said earnestly. "There has been nothing that was wrong between Varenka Petrovna and me!" The old man's irritation increased to anger and his eyes began to blaze.

"Then God help your standards," he cried fiercely, "if what you have done appears to you to be the honest thing!" Ivan Egorovitch got unsteadily to his feet and went to where the other stood.

"You are an old man," he said sharply, "but you shall not talk to me like that! Now, what is it you think I have done?" Stirred even as he was, Peter Efimovitch found it hard to put his attack on his daughter's honor into words.

"You know well enough!" he declared sternly. "It is the old pursuit in the old way—only that, now, in listening to it, she is no longer an innocent girl!"

"It is not true!" cried the young man earnestly. "No one can say that through word or deed of mine a smirch of any sort has come upon her name."

"Why should I need to ask," responded Peter Efimovitch bitterly, "when the proof of it comes to me through my own eyes?"

"There was no wrong to-day," persisted the young man earnestly. "Varenka was innocent in what she did, and, except unconsciously, I had no part in the thing at all." Peter Efimovitch's jaw set obstinately and the corners of his mouth went down.

"You are more of a cur than I thought," he burst out savagely, "and God knows I had a bad enough opinion of you before! I suppose what you mean is that you were asleep and the blame, if there is any, rests on her!" Ivan Egorovitch's face went white with anger, but he struggled to control himself that he might make better salvage of her shipwreck for the woman.

"I was not asleep," he admitted, "and in that I pretended to be so, I suppose I am to blame. But the thing I want you to understand is that she believed fully that I was asleep or she never for a moment would have shown her heart. I have a better opinion of her than you," he added.

"I do not believe it!" cried the old man stubbornly.

"Ask her yourself, then. You can easily find out."

"I shall," replied the old man grimly. "I shall not rest until I have the truth." The young man's face lighted and he gave a little nod.

"That is what I wish, too," he said with quiet eagerness. "There is nothing that could be so good, either for her or me. Be reasonable, Peter Efimovitch," he went on coaxingly. "You must remember that it was long ago I wanted Varenka Petrovna and I have none of that old feeling toward her now. She is married and belongs to another man, and I am not the sort to want her unless I could have her entirely to myself. Varenka, as you ought to know, is a good woman, and what she did to-day was only a sentimental gratification of her recollection of what had gone before. She had no idea, I know, of reopening the old relation with me, and, for my part, I am equally sure that I had no desire to reopen it with her, because I now have an interest in another girl."

"God help that other, then!" burst out Peter Efimovitch solemnly. "I thank Him that she is none of mine!" Ivan Egorovitch's breath

went out with a rush and he made a plunge at the older man. His excitement lent him strength and, seizing Peter Efimovitch by both shoulders, he shook him as a dog might shake a rat.

"I am not afraid of you any more!" he cried excitedly. "Now, will you listen civilly to what I have to say?" Peter Efimovitch caught his assailant tightly by the wrists and struggled to throw off the hold. But before he could collect his scattered wits and answer, the door that led into the kitchen opened suddenly and Tatiana Vassilievna came hurriedly into the room. She stopped short when she saw the struggling men and looked with open mouth.

"What is this?" she cried sharply. "Peter Efimovitch, what are you doing to my boy?" Both men let go their hold at the interruption and Ivan Egorovitch turned to her with an apologetic grin.

"It is nothing, Tatiana Vassilievna," he said deprecatingly. "Peter Efimovitch and I were having a little argument and I was trying to show him I was right." Tatiana Vassilievna fixed her eyes on them with growing disapproval in her look.

"A sick man and an old man!" she cried contemptuously. "And when they get together nothing will do but they must come to blows!" Ivan Egorovitch put down his face diffidently and went over to her.

"I am sorry, Tatiana Vassilievna, that I have made trouble in your house. If you will give me my hat I will go away at once." The woman looked doubtfully from him to Peter Efimovitch as if willing to learn more before passing judgment in the case, but after a moment she made up her mind and without further query did as he had asked. He took the hat with a smile of propitiatory humility, and said to her under his breath,

"Talk with Peter Efimovitch after I am gone. I will come back this afternoon and tell you about the affair." When he was gone, Tatiana Vassilievna turned to his antagonist with determination in her eye.

"Now," she said with emphasis, "why is it that you can never learn to be decently civil to that boy?" The old man was still panting from the struggle he had gone through and it did not help his composure to be brought thus to book.

"Civil be damned!" he snarled angrily. "The man is a snake and I have no place for him except under my foot!"

"You ought to be ashamed, Peter Efimovitch," said Tatiana Vassilievna indignantly. "The lad is as good a boy as you could find this side of the sea."

"Let him keep clear of my girl, then," he declared surlily, "and I will never raise the question of his worth!" Tatiana Vassilievna put her knuckles on her hips and the skin on her cheeks grew tighter with the scorn that she held in.

"Since God began you a fool, Peter Efimovitch," she said caustically, "I suppose it is no use for a woman to try to help it now. But why you should waste your time working to keep those two young things apart is beyond the comprehension of my mind. Where in all Russia could you find a more likely man to 'kiss her under the crown'?" Peter Efimovitch's lip lifted maliciously

"How many lovers do you think a woman ought to have at one time?" he demanded with a sneer.

"As many as she likes," responded Tatiana

Vassilievna promptly, "provided she settles on one only in the end."

"Well, I do not," declared the old man with conviction. "When a woman marries one man he ought to be enough!" Tatiana Vassilievna looked at him with amazement in her face.

"What are you talking about, anyway?" she demanded breathlessly.

"I am talking about Varenka and her relation to this man." Tatiana Vassilievna was so shocked by the surprise, that she stood looking at him open-mouthed and crossed herself vigorously before she spoke, as a protection against the evil thought.

"Varenka!" she cried incredulously. "It is not Varenka, it is Motrya that he wants!"

"You know nothing about it," shouted the old man triumphantly. "If it is not Varenka, why did I find them kissing each other here in this very room?"

"I do not believe you did. When was it?" she answered bluntly.

"Just now, when I came in."

"And he was kissing her?"

"No, he was lying down and she was bending over him with her lips touching his!" Tatiana

Vassilievna's practical mind jumped instinctively to the truth.

"*Nu!*" she said in cheerful contradiction. "If Varenka Petrovna did it she thought he was asleep." The old man shook his head.

"Though that be so," he said stubbornly, "she ought not to have done it even then." Tatiana Vassilievna heard him to the end and her face lighted with a smile.

"Why, that is no crime," she declared breezily. "If I had gone in and found him there asleep, I am not sure but I should have been kissing him myself!" Peter Efimovitch had no answer ready for this flank attack and contented himself with snorting vigorously. Tatiana Vassilievna was well satisfied with her advantage and proceeded at once to a new attack.

"You are stretching the wrong string, Peter Efimovitch," she said warningly. "You will find no break in Varenka Petrovna, no matter how hard you pull. Why, man, where are your eyes?" she cried with sudden change of front. "If you had half looked you would have seen that he sticks as closely to Motrya as a shadow to a duck. He has no thought for any other woman in the world!"

There came to Peter Efimovitch a sudden recollection of the young man's justification of a similar sort and, like a flash, the familiar relations he had blindly observed between the two took on a new and astonishing significance. The knowledge, however, brought little either of comfort or relief. It was no advantage that Ivan Egorovitch had transferred his affections from one to the other of his brood.

"I will not have it," he protested with an added sense of wrong. "Let him take his accursed wooing somewhere else!" He pressed the palms of his hands together nervously and began walking feverishly up and down. Tatiana Vassilievna watched him with increased content.

"Do not try to bite your elbow, Peter Efimovitch," she advised curtly. "It can not be done even if it is near your face. Be reasonable and let the young things have the comfort of their lives." He gave her a look so full of malevolent bitterness that she took counsel of her discretion and left him to himself. His anger remained as a possession and he continued to walk the floor like a wild beast, until she called him to his midday meal.

He came mechanically, but was too gloomy and absorbed to eat. The food was sawdust to him, and, after a decent pretense, he got up from the table and, without his usual pipe, went back moodily to his work. The sense of his defeat was strong in him and its taste was not the less bitter that it had been through his own foolish blindness that the young man's later passion had found chance to gather strength.

That there should be an end at once to the entanglement became an instant predication in his mind. He searched his cunning, not only for means to bring the association to an end, but further, for anything that might prove disconcerting to the young man by himself. The safest way out lay in bringing about an instant separation of the pair, and, if he did not send the girl away, steps, he decided, must be taken to have the young man removed. In this mood it was a relief to find some one with whom he could agree, and it was therefore with a real sense of pleasure, that, arriving at the warehouse, he came unexpectedly on the priest.

Simeon Gvosdef had recovered sufficiently to drag himself out into the sun, and sat, a

shrunken heap, beside the warehouse door. He made no sign of recognition as Peter Efimovitch approached, but kept his eyes bent furtively on the ground. The latter felt no thrill of sympathy over the priest's forlorn estate, but the thought that he, too, had suffered at Ivan Egorovitch's hands weighed with him, so that he stopped and looked curiously at the sitting man.

"So he did not drown you after all!" he said in his rasping voice. Simeon Gvosdef raised his head slowly and looked at his interlocutor with suspicious eyes.

"He could not drown me," he said quietly. "God has put me here to carry out a mission, and until that is fulfilled, he would not be allowed. It was not my life the young man sought, when he overturned the boat." Peter Efimovitch's lips shut tight together and, in his surprise, he blew softly through his nose.

"Well," he said dryly, "it is a good thing to have faith! But the man must have had some motive in turning you into the sea."

"Yes," responded the priest softly, "there was a motive without doubt." He broke off a splinter from a beam beside him and began

slowly drawing scratches with it in the ground at his side.

"He did not think I would know it," he said without looking up. "It was not my life he desired, but the bell."

"The bell!"

"Yes, the bell. I had it hanging round my neck."

"But why should he so want the bell?" asked Peter Efimovitch in astonishment.

"It was not for himself, but for his master—that Mikhail Sergeievitch might be less afraid. The lieutenant set him to steal it from me long before."

"And it is gone?" asked Peter Efimovitch with growing interest.

"Yes, since the time I was in the boat." Peter Efimovitch realized that under the circumstances its disappearance was probably one of simple loss, but he made no sign to that effect, in that he saw in the incident a chance to do to Ivan Egorovitch an unexpected harm.

"This is a serious matter," he said gravely. "Why do you not make the charge and ask for his arrest?"

"I have thought of it," replied the other list-

lessly, "but what would be the use? It is before Mikhail Etolin that he would have to be tried."

"But the bell was church property and its stealing was an offense against God as well as you. The lieutenant would not dare to ignore the charge if it were made." The priest considered the matter silently for a moment and then shook his head.

"No," he said, "I will wait till he dies and there is another judge." Peter Efimovitch felt an uncomfortable chill along his spine at the other's air of conviction.

"Will it then be so soon?" he asked huskily.

"Yes, soon enough. I shall not have long to wait." But waiting of any sort was not a part of Peter Efimovitch's plan, as long as he saw a way to make things go.

"There would be no delay at all," he suggested, "if it were taken to another judge. Shelikof's title to the company is so infirm just now that he would go far before he would let it be said in Russia that an officer of his had failed to punish a crime against the Church." The priest sighed hopelessly and settled back into his place.

"I have no influence," he said, "and Russia is too far away."

"But why not Yakutat? That is only two days." The priest's eyes lighted with sudden interest and he sat gradually upright.

"I might write and see," he said under his breath. "How long is it before a letter could be sent out?"

"The regular mail went out last week, but a special messenger starts to-morrow morning with an unexpected requisition for supplies. I am making out the list of them to-day." Simeon Gvosdef's color rose and his hands began to tremble so he could scarcely hold them still.

"I will do it!" he cried eagerly. "I will make the charge and, if God wills it, there will be the punishment for Ivan Egorovitch that he deserves." Peter Efimovitch's face beamed with his elation and he patted Simeon Gvosdef on the arm.

"Good!" he said. "Then there will be no delay. Write out the packet to-day and bring it to me here and I will see that it goes to the messenger with our despatch."

When Ivan Egorovitch went out from the company of Peter Efimovitch and Zakar Med-

vedef's wife, he grinned to himself, almost before he was alone. Yet there was an element of ruefulness behind the humor, which served to keep him from more boisterous mirth. He could laugh at the situation and even at the plight in which he had been put. But he could not but be sorry that he had stirred again the fire of Peter Efimovitch's enmity, and, especially, that through him, Varenka Petrovna should have come to shame.

At thought of her, he turned and looked back intently at the place where she was housed. There was no stir about the cottage to show that any one was there, and he began to wonder if she had told Motrya Petrovna of the happenings of the day, and, if so, what the younger girl had said. It took only a moment's thought, however, to convince him that the confidence had not been given and that he had no occasion for alarm. Varenka Petrovna had no special yearning for reproach and it was not likely that, unpressed, she would give avoidable publicity to her disgrace.

If Motrya Petrovna came to know the truth, it would not be through her sister's confidence, but because her father had told her with an

eye to hurt his suit. It behooved him, therefore, to see Motrya Petrovna before the disclosure was brought untimely to her ears, and forestall the trouble by telling her himself.

He could scarcely eat his dinner through impatience for his plan, and, the meal once done, he took his hat again and sallied out into the street. He had but one thought—to see Motrya Petrovna and talk with her alone—but how that purpose was to be accomplished was yet by no means certain in his mind.

But for her sake and his own, he did not wish to come on Varenka Petrovna again until she had time to recover from her shame. And with her at hand, he knew that he could not open his heart to the younger sister as he would. He decided, finally, to go again to Tatiana Vassilievna and throw himself on her mercy to help him with his plan. He knew that by this time Peter Efimovitch would be gone again to work and that the chance was good for seeing her alone.

He found her, as usual, busy with her work, but when he came in, she spared the time to stop and look at him. She did not speak, but stood with hands engaged, and stared and con-

tinued to stare at him with her head turned quizzically on one side.

"Do not look at me like that, Tatiana Vassilievna. You make me nervous!" he said finally. But Tatiana Vassilievna was not so to be beguiled.

"What are you here for again?" she said with as stern a pretense of disapprobation as she could muster for the time.

"To make confession and lay claim to the reward," declared the young man gaily. He came up close to her and stood with his hat held in front of him with both hands.

"Tell me quick!" he said breathlessly. "Was he very fierce?" Tatiana Vassilievna's eyes began to twinkle, and her face relaxed.

"Like a bear!" she said with strong conviction. "He said you were a snake!"

"And did he tell you how I was breaking up his home?"

"Indeed he did, in words that must have burned his mouth."

"That is why I shook him," interposed the young man apologetically. "He was saying that before I went away."

"Well, he had no better opinion of you after

you were gone. It was hard work to cool him down."

"How did you do it?" demanded the young man delightedly.

"I told him that he was a fool—that it was not Varenka at all, but Motrya, with whom you were in love." The young man's face sobered for the moment and he involuntarily caught his breath.

"Saint Basil help us!" he gasped. "And what did he say to that?"

"He intimated that it was sometimes best not to come in to dinner till you had been invited to sit down." Ivan Egorovitch laughed, but Tatiana Vassilievna could see that his gaiety was less spontaneous than before.

"I might have known he would oppose it," he said thoughtfully. "I wonder if he has told Motrya what occurred."

"No. He went back to his work after dinner without going over to the other house." Ivan Egorovitch's heart jumped, and he seized his companion with both hands.

"Tatiana Vassilievna," he said imploringly, "I must see Motrya Petrovna before Peter Efimovitch comes home to-night. Could you

not get her over here for me so that I could talk to her alone?" Tatiana Vassilievna's face made pretense of taking on its old mask of hardness, and she solemnly shook her head.

"It is not possible," she said gravely.

"Why not?"

"I am sure she is not able to come out."

"Then bring Varenka Petrovna over here so that I can see Motrya there."

"Varenka Petrovna," went on Tatiana Vassilievna pitilessly, "will hardly come over after what happened here to-day!" The young man pressed her hands warmly and bent down so that he could look more closely into her eyes.

"You will help me, will you not, Tatiana?" he said appealingly. "You do not want to see me suffer just because I am in love!" Tatiana Vassilievna pushed him from her and stretched back her head as if to hold herself further away.

"It is the way with all lovers," she said hopelessly. "If you will be a mushroom, you must go into the basket like the rest!"

"But, Tatiana, could you not get Varenka to go somewhere else?"

"No," she said, "because she is already gone. I saw her climbing the hill toward where

her husband is at work." The young man fairly gasped in his surprise.

"Why did you not tell me?" he said reproachfully. "Then Motrya is alone?"

"Yes—unless you or some one else intrudes on her."

"May an angel pass and brush you with its wings!" cried the young man joyously. He put both his arms around Tatiana Vassilievna's shoulders and kissed her heartily on either cheek. She pushed him away from her and motioned with her hands.

"Oh, go!" she cried. "If you are not more careful, Zakar Alexievitch, too, will be charging you with meddling with his peace." But Ivan Egorovitch scarcely heard the words. Almost before she spoke, he was across the room and, with a wave of the hand, he went lightly out through the door on his way to the other house. Tatiana Vassilievna gazed after him fondly, with her hands on her hips. When he was out of sight, she threw back her head and let her mouth open in a long, silent laugh. Then with a sigh and a shrug of resignation to events, she turned about and went happily back to her work.

Ivan Egorovitch's buoyancy of spirit carried

him across the intervening space between the houses as jauntily as if he trod on air. The door was shut, but he knocked imperiously and scarcely found the patience to await the answer from within. When it came he raised the latch without delay and entering, stood looking eagerly around.

The girl he had come to see sat on the edge of the platform along the inner wall and did not rise at his approach. She had improvised a couch with pillows and the covers from the beds and, propped against these, she waited for him with a smile on her face. He went at once to where she sat and bent with tenderness above the hand she held out.

"I knew you would come," she said softly, and lifted her eyes to his. He saw that she was gowned in some loose stuff of soft red and that her hair was not dressed as usual, but braided and caught behind her neck. But besides these differences, he was aware that there was a change in her that ran in some subtle way to every fiber of her being. There was a new droop of her eyelids as she met his glance, and a scarcely perceptible flutter of her breath. She was the same and yet not the same, and he

realized that by some miracle of the night—in the time since he had seen her last—her girlishness had expanded and the flower of her conscious womanhood come suddenly to bloom.

"How did you know that I would come?" he said after a little pause. Her glance wavered under his ardent look and her eyelids dropped suddenly down. Then, without a word, she raised her eyes to his again, and her lips parted in a slow, meaning smile. The young man felt his pulse stir as he saw it and the intoxication of success ran over him like fire.

"Ah, you have come to know!" he cried with swift conviction, and would have taken her in his arms. But she held him from her and let herself sink back against the pillows, the blood rising redly in her cheeks.

"Yes, I have come to know," she whispered softly. She bent down her head and bit her lips, for the confession was yet so new to her it still seemed over-bold. The young man did not let her go an instant from his glance and, after a moment, with a quiet air of ownership, he sat down by her side.

His thoughts went whirling dizzily in a flood of blissful visions, and for the time he sought

no more than to be near her and know that he had her heart. With the new relation, a sudden shyness fell on them both and they leaned apart from each other with a hitherto unknown reserve. Ivan Egorovitch sought in vain for his usual flow of speech and the girl, finding herself so near him, remembered the innocent familiarities, which for years had been current between them, with a sudden panic at the heart. This, however, Ivan Egorovitch found the courage for—he took up her hand and held it caressingly against his face.

"When did it come?" he asked, speaking low, as if afraid that some one else might hear.

"It was last night when you were in the sea," she said with some constraint. "It came to me all at once what it would be if you should not come back." Gathering courage, he drew her forward till her hair was almost against his face.

"Then you are sure?" he cried. "And after this there will be no mistake?"

"So sure," she said, "that it seems now that it could never have been a different way." He drew her more closely to him, but she pushed him back.

"Wait!" she said breathlessly. "Let me—" He yielded to her wish and, taking his face between her hands, she drew it down till it was almost against hers. Then with a touch as light as air, her lips brushed swiftly across his forehead and settled for an instant on his eyes.

"I have been thinking I would do that," she said very softly, and hid her face bashfully against his sleeve. He gathered her to him till he could feel the beat of her heart against his breast.

"And now that you have done it," he whispered, "do you not find it sweet?" For answer she clung to him with sudden closeness, and nodded without lifting up her head.

"It was a consecration," she said solemnly. "I wanted it first that way."

"But now—" he persisted. "When may I have the rest?"

"When you like," she answered under her breath, and their lips met in their first lovers' kiss. Her joy in surrender was so complete that Ivan Egorovitch felt a pang whenever he thought of what he had come primarily to tell. He tried to screw his courage to the sticking-point, but each time failed to find the heart to

destroy in smallest part the pretty fabric of her trust.

"You are sure of yourself," he said finally. "How do you know that you are sure of me?" She smiled at him without a waver of suspicion in her eyes.

"Why should my trust be less than yours?" she said steadily. "I know that you believe in me."

"But," said the young man soberly, "this is the only time you have been in love." There was a shade of seriousness in his tone and Motrya Petrovna responded to it. She drew back a little and looked at him with an air of wondering search.

"Do you mean, Ivan, that you have something to tell me that I ought to know?"

"Yes," he said, "if I could find the way to tell it to you now." She watched him narrowly while her mind went over the evil possibilities of which she was aware.

"Is it about Varenka?" she asked suddenly, and felt her heart-beat quicken as she awaited his reply.

"Yes," he admitted. "It is about her."

"And there is nothing else?"

"No, outside of that, my record sheet is clear."

"Then I will not hear it," she decided positively. "I have seen you with her and I am not afraid."

"God bless you!" he cried involuntarily. "You are better to me than I deserve."

"Perhaps better than you have deserved before," she answered gently, "but not than what you will deserve from this time on."

"Then," he said, "your faith is strong enough to believe in me henceforward, no matter what you hear?"

"I love you," she answered simply, "and I would not believe evil of you except from your own mouth."

There was a cautious tap at the door and Tatiana Vassilievna put in her head.

"I am coming in," she said warningly. "I have been doubtful this whole hour whether you two young things should be left alone." The lovers sat more decorously apart, but Ivan Egorovitch still held stoutly to Motrya Petrovna's hand.

"It is all right, Tatiana Vassilievna," he cried joyously. "I knew it would be if you would let

me see her alone!" The girl's eyes dropped shyly at the unexpected announcement and Tatiana Vassilievna came promptly over to her and gathered her in her arms.

"That is good!" she declared with satisfaction. "I am glad that it is so. He does not deserve to have you, but somehow he has fingers for milking favors from the Lord that the rest of us could never coax Him to give down. I will help you all I can with your father and the rest, and—when you are married—" she added, bending down so that she whispered in the other's ear, "I will myself see that the cartwheel is forthcoming to set up for the stork." The girl flushed furiously and bent down her head; and Tatiana Vassilievna turned to the young man and beckoned with her hand.

"You had better go now," she said. "I came in to tell you that it is almost six o'clock, and that Ossip and Varenka are coming down the hill."

CHAPTER X

PETER LAYS A PLOT

The afternoon had been sultry and oppressive. The sky was clear at dawn, but the clouds had risen steadily all day and over the high land to the east there had been for some time premonitory rumblings of a storm among the trees. Beyond this, it was absolutely still, but as Ivan Egorovitch came out of Motrya Petrovna's house there was a rustle of nearer branches and a sudden wind went by that sent little puffs of dust running all across the slope. Then it was still again until, here and there, with distinct splashings, great single drops of rain began to fall.

The young man stopped and looked dubiously up at the sky. He pulled up his collar so that it would protect his neck, and, in the delay, caught sight, not only of Varenka Petrovna and her husband, but also of Peter Efimovitch as he returned home from his work.

The old man was eager to arrive before the breaking of the storm and was walking swiftly, with his whole thought bent on his desire. Ivan Egorovitch saluted him as he passed, but Peter Efimovitch vouchsafed no answer further than a scowl. The finding of the young man at this place so far impressed itself on him, however, that after he had passed, he stopped short and looked back at him and then around suspiciously at the house Ivan Egorovitch had just left. It needed only the discovery of his older daughter with her husband in the distance coming home, to make it plain to him that the young man had stolen a march on him while he was away and had obtained an interview with Motrya Petrovna alone.

With the common parental instinct, he quickened his pace as if even yet, by hurry, the loss might be retrieved. But more than this, the sense of bitterness and anger began to seethe and boil within him and stir him to decisive action. Varenka and her husband, however, arrived almost as he crossed the sill, so his desired opportunity of questioning Motrya Petrovna was of necessity deferred.

He watched her closely, however, in the inter-

val before he was called for supper to the other house. She seemed to have recovered entirely from her indisposition and was intensely, almost hilariously, gay. Her cheeks were bright with color and her eyes sparkled with animation as she talked.

Varenka Petrovna, on the contrary, was silent and depressed, and when her eyes met her father's, they turned aside with the frightened look which they had shown when she became conscious that he had been a witness to her indiscretion with Ivan Egorovitch earlier in the day. Had she been less reticent and absorbed, it is probable that Motrya Petrovna would have let out to her her secret, for her heart was so full of it that it trembled constantly on her tongue. But the older sister shrank from an exchange of confidences and kept her husband by her so that no chance of them should occur.

When Peter Efimovitch returned from his meal, Ossip Pavelovitch and his wife were busy in the house and Motrya Petrovna sat by herself in the dusk, on a bench, outside the door. He seated himself absently beside her and, taking out his pipe, filled it and settled himself to smoke.

The girl smiled up at him affectionately as he

took his place, and put out her hand so that it rested on his knee. But she was so wrapped up in her dreaming that she did not care to talk, and they sat in silence for some moments while Peter Efimovitch considered what he would better do.

The little shower had passed and the air was deliciously fresh and cool. The sun had long been down, but the twilight was still strong enough so that he could see clearly his daughter's face. It was a more difficult thing than he had deemed it, to come by question to the understanding he desired, and before he was ready to begin the girl herself spoke out.

"Simeon Gvosdef must be still quite ill," she said suddenly. "It is long past six and he has not yet rung his bell."

"He will not ring it," said the old man significantly. "It is gone."

"Gone?" she echoed with a mild surprise. Then, as the effect of its being silenced impressed itself on her mind, she added thoughtfully:

"I do not believe that Mikhail Sergeievitch will be sorry that it is so."

"There is no doubt of that," replied Peter

Efimovitch dryly, "for it was he who set Ivan Egorovitch to take the bell away." The girl's interest was roused at once by the mention of her lover's name.

"What do you mean?" she demanded with renewed attention. "What has Ivan Egorovitch done?"

"I do not know, myself," said the old man cautiously, "but Simeon Gvosdef says he took the bell from him when he had him in the sea." The girl's loyalty woke at once to Ivan Egorovitch's defense.

"Well, I know," she cried impulsively, "that he did not do anything of the sort. He had no thought in going out to Simeon Gvosdef except to save his life."

"No doubt! No doubt!" replied Peter Efimovitch hastily, "but the bell was around the priest's neck when he went in and when Ivan Egorovitch got through with him it was gone. At best it is one man's word against another's how it occurred."

"Any one but Simeon Gvosdef," replied the girl scornfully, "would have made very sure of his charge before imputing evil to a man who had just saved his life."

"That is true," replied the old man with an ingratiatory nod, "but how do you know he did not have orders from Mikhail Sergeievitch to watch his chance to take the bell?"

"Because," she burst out excitedly, "if it had been so, I should have known!"

"Does he, then, tell you everything he thinks?" Motrya Petrovna saw the point to which her father was leading her, but in her eagerness she did not care.

"Indeed, he does," she declared confidently, "and in this case his sympathy is entirely with the priest."

"It may be—it may be!" said Peter Efimovitch tentatively, "but how does it happen that he confides so much in you?" Motrya Petrovna did not immediately reply, and, putting his arm around her, he drew her toward him till she was close against his side.

"Tell me honestly," he said with unaccustomed gentleness. "I think I have a right to know."

"I suppose," she said with such courage as she could muster, "it is because he is fond of me and we have been together for so long."

"Then you have come to care for him as

well?'' The girl put her head against his coat so he could not see her face.

''Yes,'' she said defiantly, ''and I have told him that I do.''

''When?'' demanded the old man laconically.

''This afternoon.'' He put her from him abruptly with a well-assumed exclamation of surprise.

''Not to-day!'' he cried, holding her at arm's length so he could look into her eyes.

''Yes, to-day.''

''God help us!'' he exclaimed. ''It does not take the young man long to change his tune!''

''What do you mean?'' she demanded breathlessly. Peter Efimovitch shook his head and made as if he were about to rise.

''No! No!'' he said, ''I have no more to say. It was only that you took me by surprise that I spoke of it at all.'' He pushed her gently away from him, but she held him and would not let him go.

''No,'' she cried, ''I will not have it so! Tell me why he should not have spoken to me to-day?'' Peter Efimovitch felt a glow of satisfaction that she should rise so readily to the bait.

"What is the use?" he asked coolly. "I have been telling you about him for a long time, and, unless I praise him, you simply believe that I am prejudiced toward him, and unfair." But the girl had in her much of his own firmness of disposition, where this quality became a need.

"Tell me," she insisted. "I shall not rest until I know." He hesitated long enough to let her anxiety grow really warm and then said slowly:

"You have full faith in him, of course?"

"Yes," she said, and hated herself that she could not control her voice.

The old man smoked in silence and without being able, seemingly, to formulate satisfactorily his thought. Finally, he took his pipe from his mouth and looked around at her with meditative gravity.

"It is a long story, if I told it all to you," he said slowly. "He is so changeable that I never liked him from the first. You think he tells you all that is in his heart. I, for my part, am sure that he does not. For instance, he has made you believe that his whole desire is to help the priest, but all the time behind your back he has been rummaging Simeon Gvosdef's

things and moving Heaven and earth to take away his bell." Motrya Petrovna did not at once reply. It was a new thing to her to doubt her lover, and the experience was not one that she enjoyed.

"There is some mistake," she cried resentfully. "He has never told me a falsehood in his life!"

"Perhaps," said her father doubtfully. "But there is another side. You surely have not forgotten that before he left Russia it was your sister and not you that occupied his thought." The girl's courage wavered and she gave a little sob.

"That was long ago," she said tremulously. "I am not afraid about it now. He does not love Varenka any more."

"How do you know?" he demanded searchingly. "Has he said that he does not?" Motrya Petrovna's desire to give the answer that would clear her lover struggled strenuously with her wish to tell the truth.

"If he has not," she said proudly, "it is because I would not let him talk about the matter more."

"You are sure of him, then," he went on piti-

lessly, "and feel that he is keeping nothing back?"

"As sure as I am of myself," she declared eagerly. "There is nothing for him to tell." Peter Efimovitch puffed at his pipe for some moments, and when he spoke again it was in a lower tone.

"I suppose you know," he said slowly, "that he and Varenka have been holding secret meetings, both here and in the other house!" In her astonishment the girl sat upright and looked at Peter Efimovitch with wide-opened mouth.

"Be careful, father!" she cried warningly. "It is Varenka's honor, as well as mine, you touch when you say that!" The strain of holding back the bitterness that was in him was beginning to tell on Peter Efimovitch and he relapsed into something of his old snarl.

"God knows I know it!" he cried harshly. "But for all that, it is true!" The girl struggled bravely against her suspicion and tried to show a steady front.

"There is some mistake," she cried again piteously. "It could not possibly have occurred!" But Peter Efimovitch would not let her off.

"It began," he said with insidious persistence, "here, in this house, the first day that she came. It was repeated for the last time to-day, at noon, two hours, perhaps, before he came to you!" It was growing so dark that he could no longer see her face, but he was aware that she still sat rigidly in her place, forgetful of everything but the blow he had just dealt her.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh!" as if her trouble were too deep for words. Peter Efimovitch waited till his disclosure had time to take full effect, and presently the reaction came. The girl's hands went up to her face, she bent forward in a huddled heap, and he could hear that she was crying softly to herself.

"Ivan!" she said, "Ivan!—I can not believe it!" The old man laid down his pipe deliberately and put his arm sympathetically across her shoulders.

"There! there!" he said. "You must not cry. He is not worth it." She did not resent his attempt at comfort, though it brought her small relief.

"You are sure that they were there?" she said finally.

"Yes, I found them alone together when I

came in at noon." Motrya Petrovna caught at a straw to sustain her unbelief.

"But that does not prove anything!" she declared with forlorn eagerness. "Even if they were alone together, it does not show there was anything wrong." She looked at him with such pathetic hope that he would decide the truth to lie in the direction she wished, that, anxious as he was to bring her enterprise to wreck, he could not but be sorry for her pain.

"It is a hard road, little fish," he said sympathetically, "and I only wish that I could make it easy for you as you go. But is it not best that I should tell you the truth now, rather than let you go on unconsciously until you further bruise your feet?"

"Yes," she whispered breathlessly, "it is better that I should know!"

"And shall I tell you, then, the rest?" She was curiously silent for a moment and he could guess at the conflict that was going on in her between her anxiety and her pride.

"Yes, tell me," she said finally, and there was a threatening hardening of her voice. "But I warn you that if it is not adequate, I shall tell you what I think!"

"So be it," he said simply, and took up his pipe. The fire in it had gone out while it was on the bench and, in the waiting, Motrya Petrovna could hear the whistle of the air in it as he sucked unconsciously at it while he thought.

"It was just at noon," he began moodily, "and I had come home as usual to eat. I went in by the front door and found them alone together in the room. He was lying on the bed, and was covered as if for night. She was bending over him and as I looked I saw them kiss each other as lovers do upon the lips!" The girl stood up hastily and pushed away his arm.

"It is enough!" she said brokenly. "Do not tell me any more. I can not bear it!" She stood in the same stiff pose, looking unseeingly out into the night. The suddenness of the calamity that had come upon her numbed her mercifully for the moment, and she knew only that she was being buffeted by the whirlwind, without strength to make clear estimate of her loss. But almost at once the kindly anæsthetic began to lose its power and a heartache took her with such sharpness that she could not remain still.

"I can not bear it!" she repeated sharply.

"Oh, what shall I do?" She covered her eyes with her hands, as if by shutting out the sight of outward things to limit the poignancy of her distress. Her father watched her closely and, putting out his hand, drew her to him again upon the bench.

"What did they say?" she demanded suddenly. "Did they give no reason for what you saw?"

"What could they?" returned the old man dryly. "I had seen it myself."

"But Varenka—" cried the girl protestingly. Peter Efimovitch shrugged his shoulders and gave a sigh of resignation to the facts.

" She has made me no explanation," he said sorrowfully. "She avoids me and will not talk with me alone. As for the young man, he laughs and admits the thing, and says there was no wrong." The girl's eyes blazed and she grasped Peter Efimovitch tightly by the arm.

"You talked with him, then!" she panted. "Did you tell him what you thought?"

"Yes," said the old man fiercely, "and he struck me because I said he was a cur!" There was no need now for him to act a part. He was moved by the sense of his own wrongs, and his

eyes flashed and his chest swelled indignantly as he remembered them.

"If I were not so old," he cried regretfully, "he would not have to wait for God to punish him." Then he came back to the scheme he had in hand.

"I did what I could," he said apologetically, "and yet now I have to hear you say that you are in love with him and are going to be his wife!" The girl shuddered and pressed herself closer to his side.

"Oh, no! Not now!" she cried in eager protest. "I did not know this when I promised that. I never want to see the man again!" With an effort, she rose unsteadily and stood with the palms of her hands pressed convulsively together. "What shall I do!" she added bitterly. "Oh, what shall I do!" Peter Efimovitch watched her without effort to lighten her distress.

"You are well rid of him!" he growled with curt conviction. "God grant you may never look at him again!" The girl heard him without comment and remained with averted face while she wrestled with the rebellious pain that was in her heart. Then, with a quick motion,

she turned and made a sudden little rush into her father's arms.

"Why did you tell me?" she cried reproachfully. "I was so happy in it all before I knew!" Peter Efimovitch drew her tightly to him and comforted her as best he could.

"Have courage!" he said soothingly. "You will not have to see him again. As soon as the time serves, I will take you to another place."

"How soon?" she demanded. "I must—oh, I must—get away!"

"As soon as there is a boat. To-morrow if you like."

"Yes! Yes! To-morrow!" she assented breathlessly. "It can not be too soon." She was still crying, but, after a little, she put off her father's arms and pushed him away from her, toward the house.

"Go," she said, "and leave me here a little while. I wish to be alone." He was reluctant to abandon her, and stood trying to soothe her and holding to her hands. And so it happened that he did not see Tatiana Vassilievna approaching, till she came on them suddenly like a ghost, out of the night.

"Are you making love to her, Peter Efimo-

vitch," she called gaily, "that you are so tenderly holding her hands?" Peter Efimovitch promptly let go his hold and Motrya Petrovna, with a great sob of relief, turned swiftly to Tatiana Vassilievna and threw herself into her arms. The older woman asked no questions, but gathered the girl to her bosom, and mothered her as if she had been a child.

"Never mind, dearie," she said soothingly. "It will be all right, I know." When she had quieted her somewhat, she turned to Peter Efimovitch, who still stood idly by.

"What have you been saying to her?" she demanded sharply. "Have you been poisoning her with tales of what happened at my house to-day?" Peter Efimovitch shrugged his shoulders and put out his hands.

"I have told her nothing but the truth!" he answered sullenly.

"Yes," she returned mockingly, "the kind of truth that thumps well on top, but has a bad spot on the underside. It is not the first time I have seen you do it!" She looked at him with a scorn that might have withered him where he stood.

"You have done enough!" she added. "Go

inside and leave her now to me." The old man obeyed her with reluctance, fearful that in his absence she might undo the crafty work he had begun. But without further notice of him, she drew the girl out into the dark, and, after a moment's irresolution, he cursed softly to himself and went slowly into the house.

Tatiana Vassilievna continued her ministrations till Motrya Petrovna became more composed. Then she gave a final smoothing to her hair and patted her gently on the cheek.

"I knew that it would come all right," she whispered. "Did he make you think that Ivan was wholly bad?" The girl nodded vigorously, but did not raise her head.

"Well, your father does not know everything," went on Tatiana Vassilievna bluntly. Motrya Petrovna sorrowfully shook her head.

"I wish I could believe it," she said faintly. "But, oh, Tatiana, he saw them with his own eyes!"

"Well, I do not believe it for all that," returned Tatiana Vassilievna stoutly. The girl raised her head with a sudden gleam of hope.

"Were you there?" she demanded breathlessly.

"No," admitted the other reluctantly, "but I am sure of it just the same." Motrya Petrovna let her head fall back dejectedly.

"Oh, dear," she said, "why is there not some way by which I could be certain, too?"

"There is," said Tatiana Vassilievna promptly. "Send for Ivan Egorovitch and let him tell you the truth, himself." The girl drew hastily back and there was a look that was almost horror on her face.

"Oh, I could not!" she said positively. "I would not talk to him about it for the world!"

"But you will have to, sooner or later," urged Tatiana Vassilievna practically. "He is not the sort to give you peace until you do."

"I am going away," returned the girl, "and it will not matter for the short time I am here." Tatiana Vassilievna's jaw dropped in her surprise.

"When do you go?" she demanded.

"To-morrow, if possible, with the special boat." The older woman recognized instinctively the plot that Peter Efimovitch had hatched up, and saw that if it was to be met, there was need for strenuous and immediate action.

"Come over to my house with me," she urged solicitously. "It will be quieter and I believe you will sleep better there." The girl made no demur and they went in silence across the intervening space. Tatiana Vassilievna waited on her charge as if she had been her own and, having established her on a couch and given her a light, she slipped away softly by the rear door, and with determined haste made her way along the roughly-worn paths to Mikhail Etolin's house.

Ivan Egorovitch, when she found him, listened with absorbed interest to what she had to say. She told him nothing of Motrya Petrovna's threatened flitting to the north, but gave him graphic particulars of the tales that had been told, and of Motrya Petrovna's sorrow and distress.

He fell at once into her plan and went with her without an instant of delay. He was so sure of himself and of the girl he loved that he had not a moment's fear as to the result, and only felt regret that she should suffer from the prick of a so unnecessary pain. When they reached the door, he stopped and laid his hand on Tatiana Vassilievna's arm.

"Wait here!" he said. "Let me go in alone."

She obeyed him reluctantly and stood aside, and, after a moment's pause, with his head down, as if collecting himself for the fray, he opened the door abruptly and passed in out of sight.

Motrya Petrovna's face was turned away and she did not see him till he was well inside. Then, with a sudden spring, she landed on the floor and ran quickly back till there was a table between him and her.

"What do you want?" she panted, her eyes dilated widely with her fear. Ivan Egorovitch had the good sense to remain where he was, though it gave him a sudden pang that she should be afraid of him.

"I want you," he said. "I want to talk to you about what Peter Efimovitch has said to you to-night." She had been thinking so constantly of him that it did not appear unnatural that he should seem to know what was in her mind. The one emotion that moved her was dread of the explanation that she felt must come, and she was possessed with a wild desire to escape.

"Go!" she cried angrily. "How could you

think you had the right to come?" He went nearer till only the table was between.

"Is it really true," he said incredulously, "that you believe of me such evil things?" She met his glance unwaveringly, and a spot of color began to burn in either cheek.

"How can I help it," she said defiantly, "when I find you have deceived me as you have?" Ivan Egorovitch grew red in turn and his quick temper brought a momentary sparkle to his eyes.

"You have evidently not been difficult to convince!" he said scornfully. Her lips quivered, but she returned bravely to the attack.

"Do you think it was an easy thing for me?" she demanded. "Be sure I did not accept it till there was no further room for doubt."

"But there is no truth at all in it!" cried the young man earnestly. "I have never deceived you about anything in my life." It was sweet to her to hear his strong denial and her heart gave a treacherous flutter of hope. She was too bitterly fixed, however, to be moved easily from her belief.

"Take care!" she said, with a mournful shake of the head. "My father does not lie. He

has told me only what he saw with his own eyes.'' Ivan Egorovitch's heart ached as he looked at her and he yearned to take her in his arms. But she was poised like a startled bird and he knew that, at the first movement on his part to advance beyond the barrier that held them now apart, she would be instantly up and away in final flight. It was hard to plead with her at the longer range, but, making virtue of necessity, he leaned across the table as far as he could reach, and stretched out to her his hand.

''Motrya,'' he said pleadingly, and his voice reflected the earnestness that looked out through his eyes, ''it is scarcely four hours since you said you would never believe evil of me unless you heard it from my own mouth. You can not have forgotten it so soon. Will you not be fair to me and tell me surely what it is that I have done?'' She did not move at his appeal, except that at his gesture she put her hands hastily behind her back.

''What is the use?'' she said hopelessly. ''You could not change the facts.''

''Tell me,'' he insisted. ''It is my right to try.'' She stood uncertain and devoured him with her appealing eyes.

"Oh, if you could!" she cried, and turned away her face. When she looked at him again he saw that her eyes were wet, and she spoke in a gentler tone.

"I will tell you," she said, and with all her effort, she could not hold her voice so that it did not shake. "You shall know all that he told me and the accusations that he made." She stopped for a moment and then added wistfully, "I think you know that I shall be glad, indeed, if you can show me that they are not true."

"You will be happy then, dear heart," he answered with conviction, "for there is no fault of mine that should come between us in this way."

She stood so long, considering how she should begin, that he grew anxious.

"Go on," he said impatiently. "I want it now." She lifted her eyes to his in serious questioning, and labored to speak clearly what she had to say.

"You were honest with me, were you, Ivan, when you told me you were doing what you could to help the priest?"

"Why, certainly," he said, with new astonishment. Her inquiry was along a line he had not

thought of, and he scarcely knew what to expect.

"Then why have you followed him, behind his back, and searched his things that you might steal his bell? You did not tell me that!" The question was so different from what he had expected she would ask, that, for the moment, he was puzzled what to say. It was scarcely a positive hesitation, but she saw it and the light went out of her eyes.

"It is true, then!" she cried bitterly. "My father was not wrong.'

"It is true and it is not true," he answered. "I did search Simeon Gvosdef's things, but it was not because I wanted to, but that, as an officer of the company, I was given it to do. I have told you honestly how I feel toward him myself, and if I kept the other matter back from you it was because it was a private order and the thing was not my own to tell." Her lip drew up, as she listened, into a scornful little smile.

"Then you were not quite candid with me," she insisted, "since you let me think that I knew all your heart."

"You did," he declared doggedly. "I have

kept nothing from you that I had a right to tell."

"It is just the difference that counts," she answered, "for you made me believe in trusting you that I had it all." He did not know how to answer her and stood silent with his eyes on the floor.

"That is enough of that," she said with bitterness that was almost contempt. "Now I will ask you another thing. Why did you not tell me that you had a secret meeting with Varenka, the first day that she came?" The young man recognized Peter Efimovitch's malice in the adroitness of the attack and felt, in spite of himself, his courage slip.

"Your father has been cunning in his plan," he said. "He has told you as truth things that are almost false and yet have enough truth about them so that I can not say they are wholly lies. I did meet with Varenka Petrovna and we did talk that day. I did not tell you about it because there was nothing in it at all that could be construed in derogation of your right, and, aside from that, I was not sure that to tell it would be fair to her." The girl's excited mind grasped nothing but the final words.

"There it is again!" she cried with a gesture of despair. "There is always the reservation where I should have the whole!"

"It was only common decency!" he burst out hotly. "Do you think that I could ever tell to any one what has happened between us two?" The protest brought to Motrya Petrovna only another pang.

"Then if you could not tell me about her, you do care for her still as you do for me!" she cried wildly. "Oh, I might have known that it was so!" She covered her face with her hands and her shoulders began to shake with the convulsive tremor of her sobs.

"Was it also because it was too sacred," she went on with caustic slowness, "that you did not tell me about her this afternoon when you came to me with her kisses still on your lips?"

"I tried to tell you," he broke in protestingly, "but you would not let me speak. And as to the other, you are cruelly unjust. I have not kissed Varenka Petrovna since she has been on this side of the sea."

"My father saw you!" she interrupted. "Why do you tell me an untruth?"

"I have not lied to you. I did not do it."

"You did not kiss her?" she asked.

"Upon my honor, no! I was lying on the bed and your father saw her stoop down and kiss me." The girl shivered and gave an exclamation of disgust.

"It is a fine distinction!" she cried mockingly. "What possible difference is it, since the thing was done, which one of you began it first!" The injustice of her taunts was too much for the young man and momentarily he lost his head.

"You shall not be so unfair!" he cried, and ran swiftly round the table to the other side. He did not, however, find her wholly unprepared. She screamed as she saw him coming, as if he had been some dangerous sort of beast, and, with wild abandon, swept round the table by the other side and like a flash fled across the room and out through the open door.

CHAPTER XI

THE PRIEST VISITS THE SICK

After a first mad moment of pursuit, Ivan Egorovitch made no effort to follow Motrya Petrovna in her flight. She had vanished into the darkness before he reached the door and, while he knew that her course had been laid for the other house, he found within him no wish to come to her in that haven, where he must talk, if at all, under the eye of Peter Efimovitch and the others of her kin.

He stepped aside till he was no longer visible in the lighted background of the open door and stood listening irresolutely while he decided what to do. The sky was cloudy and shut out the stars, and the darkness hung around him like a veritable pall. It was so still that as he listened he could hear Motrya Petrovna's footsteps as she fled away. Then there was a momentary gleam of light and the sound of a door shut to, and he understood that she had arrived

at her destination and for the time, at least, was safe from his pursuit.

He moved farther away lest Tatiana Vassilievna should spy him out and demand an accounting at his hand. There was anger rather than sorrow in his heart. He felt that he had been badly treated and his pride cried out against the hurt. He remembered the spirit of confidence that he had shown before Tatiana Vassilievna and which had been proved unwarranted by the outcome. He did not wish to see her again till he had settled the matter somehow between Motrya Petrovna and himself—a thing which clearly could not be done before the following day. There was nothing to be gained by further waiting and so, moving slowly at first and then with impatient quickness as he came fully to the thought, he left the spot and returned to Mikhail Etolin's house.

The place was dark when he reached it, except for the lamp, fed with fat, that hung in front of the entrance door, and, deeming its occupants retired, Ivan Egorovitch went in on tiptoe so as not to disturb them in their sleep. He groped his way cautiously into the great room, and was feeling ahead of him with his hands, the

better to sense his way, when suddenly there was a noise behind him, an arm was passed convulsively about his shoulders and he felt a trembling hand laid on his lips.

"Be still!" said a voice in his ear. "Come over here with me, where you can see the door!" The young man had grappled instantly with the intruder, for the interruption, coming thus unexpectedly out of the silence, brought a distinct sense of shock. But at the first note of the wheezy verbal caution he recognized the lieutenant and submitted quietly to be pulled across the room.

Mikhail Etolin seemed to be under great excitement and pushed his captive down abruptly on a bench. He was trembling as if he had the ague and his breath came and went in short, spasmodic gasps. Ivan Egorovitch insisted vigorously on freeing himself and threw off Mikhail Etolin's hands.

"Let me alone!" he said under his breath. "I am not going to run away." The lieutenant slackened in the tension of his grasp and Ivan Egorovitch breathed more at his ease.

"What is it, your Well-born?" he demanded in a whisper. "Why do you not have a light?"

Mikhail Etolin's hold on his arm tightened again suddenly and he leaned over till his mouth was at the young man's ear.

"Wait and you will see!" he breathed excitedly. Ivan Egorovitch's curiosity was aroused and he set himself to attend with patience the happening of the event. He sat in alert silence and listened eagerly to every passing sound.

For some time, however, nothing occurred and he grew impatient of the delay, but the lieutenant seemed certain of what was about to come and, with a timidity that was almost eagerness, kept himself so close to his companion that he could touch him continually with his hands.

Finally there was a slight, almost imperceptible noise, and Ivan Egorovitch felt the lieutenant's fingers tighten on his arm. He looked instinctively in the direction from which the sound had come, and was convinced that outside the door there was a stir in the shadow to one side. It was at first a motion purely, with no definite form or shape, and the young man, leaning forward, with his eyes fixed on the point of interest, felt himself grow rigid with the fixity of his regard. The lieutenant began to trem-

ble again and his hand on Ivan Egorovitch's arm twitched as if suddenly it had become possessed.

After moments that seemed interminable, the formless shadow crystallized and took shape, and, out of the darkness, there was projected across the open space of the doorway the head and shoulders of Simeon Gvosdef, the priest.

His black coat and hair made him, even under the lamp, little more than an indefinite materialization of the darkness, but his white face stood out with startling distinctness against the shadowy background, and swayed and stirred in the flickering light, like a ghost come back to life.

For a moment the vision persisted, and the two watchers saw that the head was thrust out and the eyes big with eagerness in the effort to pierce the darkness that lay inside the room. Then, as suddenly as it had come, the apparition disappeared, and Ivan Egorovitch felt the grasp of Mikhail Etolin's hand grow lighter and his breathing become more calm.

"What does he want?" he whispered. "Has he been here before?"

"Yes," answered the lieutenant faintly.

"This is the fourth time to-night." The young man gave a little exclamation of surprise.

"What does he mean?" he cried. "Has he done nothing more than look in at the door?" Mikhail Etolin had grown fairly quiet, though he still trembled nervously as he sat.

"No more, thank God!" he answered. "He came only to see if I was dead."

"But," said the young man in astonishment, "why should he come so specially to-night?" The lieutenant waited a moment before answering, and then said slowly:

"They told him, I suppose, that I was at the barracks and became ill and they had to bring me home. He is trying to find out if it is really the end." Ivan Egorovitch's hand went out to him in ready sympathy.

"Then you could not hold it back!" he said regretfully. The touch and the kindly word were too much for the other's self-control. He seized the proffered hand with both of his own and began to cry like an hysterical child.

"Oh, I tried! I did try!" he answered brokenly. "But this time it was not the same. It was because I was a fool. I was sure I could hold it down and I went to the barracks because

it was the regular gathering of the men and I did not want them to think it strange I was not there. There was no trouble at the start, but suddenly I thought of it and grew nervous, and then they began to look at me curiously and it all came with a rush! It was not a heavy one, though," he added plaintively. The young man's heart went out to Mikhail Etolin, but he was embarrassed how best to voice his sympathetic thought.

"And since then you have been all this time alone?" he asked. "I did not know it or I surely would have been here."

"The priest has been my company!" said the lieutenant with a nervous laugh. "He began looking in almost at once." Ivan Egorovitch considered hastily what it was best to do.

"I wonder if he will come back," he said.

"Why not?" returned the lieutenant despondently. "He has not found out what he wants to know." The young man asked no further questions but, leaning down, began quietly to take off his boots. When this was done, he set them noiselessly aside, and leaned over to the lieutenant till he could whisper in his ear.

"Do not move," he said. "If he comes again I will see what I can do." The lieutenant remained mute, and Ivan Egorovitch tiptoed cautiously across the floor and took up his station just inside the door.

There was a time of waiting that was harder to him to bear than what had gone before. He started with every sound and made ready for encounters that did not come. It was so late in the evening that there were few human sounds outside, but in spite of Mikhail Etolin's attempt at silence, he could hear his labored breathing and his restless movements as he shifted his arms and legs.

This time, Ivan Egorovitch heard the priest before he came in view and, standing on the alert, waited impatiently for him to show his face. Simeon Gvosdef kept in the shadow till he was close to the building, as he had done before. When he had reached his place, he leaned forward from his cover so that only his head and shoulders came in the opening as he looked cautiously in through the door.

His face was so close to Ivan Egorovitch's that it seemed the priest must see, and, fearing lest the recognition would startle him and make

him immediately draw back, he reached forward with a sudden lunge, and, seizing the astonished priest by the collar, jerked him headlong into the middle of the room.

Simeon Gvosdef was small, but he was wiry, and his desperation lent him strength. He fought for his liberty like a cornered beast and, in the struggle for control, both he and his captor went rolling in a confused scramble all across the floor. The lieutenant was beside himself with excitement and, in the darkness, went dancing wildly round the combatants and shouted out directions for the fray.

"Kill him!" he cried. "Kill him!" and rained down blows on friend and foe alike. Then, as a sudden turn brought the contestants nearer to the door, the light shone on their faces so that Mikhail Etolin could distinguish them, and with an insane cry of rage, he swept Ivan Egorovitch back with a sudden motion of his arm, and dropped with his whole weight upon his enemy, his knee pressed down on the other's breast.

"Kill him!" he cried wildly, and beat the priest with his fists. Under the tremendous impact, Simeon Gvosdef's breath went out of him

with a rush. His arms dropped limply to the floor, and he lay and took his beating without attempt at avoidance or defense.

Ivan Egorovitch recovered himself and, throwing his weight as best he could against the lieutenant's heavy bulk, pushed him away from his victim, to the floor. Mikhail Etolin's strength had come entirely from his rage and, brought to his senses, he leaned back against a chair, trembling with his weakness and gasping pitifully for breath. Ivan Egorovitch took down the lamp from outside the door and held it so that he could see Simeon Gvosdef's face. The priest's eyes were closed and he lay so still that the young man turned to the lieutenant without a closer look.

"You have your wish!" he said grimly. "I believe he is dead!" Mikhail Etolin made no reply, but there was a responsive gleam in his eye which showed that the wild beast in him was still awake. The young man lighted a larger lamp and set it on a table to one side. Then he lifted Simeon Gvosdef and rolled him over on his back.

The movement was good for the priest, who was not dead, but unconscious from the shock

of Mikhail Etolin's interference with his breath. He sighed deeply once or twice, opened his eyes confusedly, carried his hand in a dazed fashion slowly across his face, and ended by raising himself till he sat waveringly upright. Once there, he remained rigidly erect, with his eyes tightly closed, while he awaited the clearing of his swimming head.

Mikhail Etolin watched him with something that was akin to panic in his look. The priest found no interest in life till his brain ceased going round, but that point reached, he opened his eyes and looked stealthily about. Almost at once, his glance fell on Mikhail Etolin, sitting opposite to him on the floor, and he made an unconscious movement to put more distance between himself and him. A second look assured him that it was beyond the power of the lieutenant just then to do him harm, and his eyes began to burn with their old insane intensity as he studied his enemy's condition and saw the ravages that disease had wrought. His manner grew to one of triumphant certainty and his face took on a look of solemn joy.

Then, as if moved by a sudden thought, he looked into his hand and, finding it empty, let

his eyes run here and there around him on the floor. Between him and the door there was a slip of paper, folded so as to hide what was within, and with an effort he reached and drew it to him with his hand. He looked around almost guiltily to see if he had been observed, and, encountering the eyes of Ivan Egorovitch, his own went promptly down. The young man waited till he should raise them again, and, when he did not, after a decent interval, addressed him as if he had his eye.

"What were you here for, anyway, looking in in that way through the door?" His voice sounded loud in the stillness and startlingly distinct. The priest kept his head bent down and, without reply, busied himself in feeling tenderly the place on his breast where Mikhail Etolin's knee had come. He thought better of the matter, however, on reflection, and, fingering nervously the paper he had taken up, he said:

"I heard that Mikhail Etolin was about to die, and I came to bring him a passport before it was too late." Despite his bodily weakness, the lieutenant's mind remained bright and clear. He understood the sort of passport he was likely to get at Simeon Gvosdef's hands and

his eyes fixed with fearful fascination on the paper the priest held.

"I am not dead yet, Simeon Gvosdef!" he cried in a thin, dry voice that was scarcely above a whisper. "You keep the passport for yourself! If God lets me get out to-morrow, it is you, and not I, who will come to death!" The priest gave no sign that he had heard the answer, beyond lifting up his eyes so that their steady gaze rested on Mikhail Etolin's face.

"It is you who will die, Mikhail Etolin," he said with impressive calmness. "You will not live long enough to do me harm." He showed such confidence in his belief that Mikhail Etolin's jaw dropped and his heavy bulk began to shake. But he held himself together as well as his weakened condition would permit, and returned defiantly the other's calculating look.

"You have done your worst," he piped triumphantly, "and you have not killed me yet!" The priest's face lighted diabolically and he pointed a significant finger at the lieutenant as he replied:

"Why are you so broken, Mikhail Sergeievitch? Did I not tell you it would come?" Between the excitement and the suggestion, the

lieutenant was dangerously near to a collapse. His lips grew purple and his breath began to whistle in his throat. He turned to Ivan Egorovitch with a glance of quick appeal.

"Put him out!" he cried in a voice that was almost a shriek. The young man went at once to Simeon Gvosdef and took him by the arm.

"Come," he said, lifting him to emphasize his words, "it is time now for you to go. You can see for yourself he is not dead." Simeon Gvosdef hung back in his place and stubbornly shook his head.

"I will not take the chance," he declared. "It is too near and he might die while I was gone." Another look at Mikhail Etolin convinced Ivan Egorovitch that, if the priest remained, the catastrophe he desired was more than sure to come.

"You have to go! You have no choice!" he cried and lifted Simeon Gvosdef with both arms. The priest resisted strenuously and strove to shake his assailant off. He had practically recovered his strength and fought, like the maniac he was, to prevent the threatened thwarting of his plan. Mikhail Etolin watched them with hungry eyes, his fingers clawing ner-

vously at the floor in his desire to be of help. In his excitement, he slipped away from the supporting chair behind him and slid down limply to the floor.

"Kill him!" he cried in his high, weak voice, and strove to raise himself by his hands and knees. Once, the struggling men fell on him and he clawed at them savagely like a cat. When Ivan Egorovitch began to get the upper hand, the lieutenant eased a little in his effort and lay face down on the floor, with his head turned to one side so he could see the fray, and continued to repeat, as often as his scant breath would allow, his vengeful, murderous cry.

The young man worked with the priest till he got him near the entrance at the front. Then, with a final effort, he lifted him and threw him bodily out into the dark. Slamming the door, he put up the bar and came back to the lieutenant panting, and with his hands pressed to his sides.

"He is gone," he said breathlessly. "Come, I will get you into bed." Mikhail Etolin braced himself for the effort, and, with the young man's help, accomplished the distance out to his sleeping-room, and ultimately to his mattress

on the platform bench. He was subdued and quiet, and very much depressed.

"He has got me," he said plaintively. "It is the beginning of the end. I am glad, though, that you threw him out. I do not mean that he shall see me die."

Ivan Egorovitch divested him of his boots and saw that he was covered for the night. Then he put out the larger lamp and, taking up the other, went back for a last look at the lieutenant before going to his own place. Mikhail Etolin lay perfectly still and seemed quite at peace, but his mind was still running on the probabilities of his fate, and, as Ivan Egorovitch turned again to go away, he caught him by the sleeve.

"Promise me," he whispered earnestly, "that you will not let him in here when I die. I have no mind to have him in the house, and I will come back and haunt you if you let him put a passport into my hand!"

It was after midnight before Ivan Egorovitch finally settled to his sleep. It had been the most strenuous day of his career, and his head was full of the exciting occurrences of the time. But, so great was his fatigue, that no sooner

was he down, than his eyes went shut, the world dropped back behind him and he knew no more until the sun had long been on its way again.

Then the whole panorama of yesterday's events came back to him with a rush, and he dressed himself in a very melancholy mood. He found the lieutenant in better condition than he had reason to expect, and saw that he was made ready and then fed, before he allowed himself his morning meal. It was plain that Mikhail Etolin must stay in bed and he remained with him for an hour, bringing him his papers as he called for them, and listening while he rearranged his plans.

"You will have to make the rounds for me today," said the lieutenant. "There is little to attend to beyond making sure that all the men are out at work. You can report to me again at noon." The young man was glad to get outside and his mind grew busy, striving to formulate some plan by which he could get a view of Motrya Petrovna while he was on the road. The trouble between them seemed less formidable in the full light of day, and he found himself impatient to try again at patching up a peace.

He arranged his detail so that its last duty would bring him out at the two cottages on the flat, and began by going to the beach where the men were drying fish. The boats had come in at dawn and the catch had been bountiful and good. The fish were being brought in in great baskets to be cleaned, and the cloths laid on the sand were already largely covered with the pink strips of flesh.

Everything seemed to be progressing as it should and he went leisurely on to where his blood-brother sat, keeping tally of the catch as it was portioned out. Stepan Dmitrievitch seemed in lively humor and greeted him with a smile.

"Were you asleep," he asked, "that you did not come down to see the little lady go?" Ivan Egorovitch looked at him in quick surprise.

"What do you mean?" he said. Stepan Dmitrievitch in turn looked back at him with sudden inquiry, and his lips drew up in a quizzical whistle of surprise.

"Did you not know, really," he said, "that Motrya Petrovna and her father went out to Yakutat this morning with the courier in the special boat?" He had no doubt, before he fin-

ished speaking, that Ivan Egorovitch had been ignorant of their start. The light went out of his face and he put out his hand in incredulous surprise.

"It can not be!" he cried. "I saw her last night and she said nothing of it then!"

"Perhaps she did not want you to know it," returned Stepan Dmitrievitch slowly. "I did not know of it myself, until I saw her here today."

"What did she say?" asked Ivan Egorovitch faintly. Stepan Dmitrievitch smiled at the recollection and went boldly on.

"She was more than kind," he said complacently. "Kinder than she has been for some time back. And when she went, she told me that she was really sorry that she had to go." Ivan Egorovitch had become so palpably disturbed that Stepan Dmitrievitch grew alarmed for him. Slipping his arm through his blood-brother's, he led him away till they were hidden from the others by a sheltering drift of sand.

"Tell me," he said sympathetically, "are you then so hardly hit?"

"It is the whole world!" rejoined Ivan Egor-

ovitch with something that was almost a sob. "I had her in my hand and her father came between us and persuaded her that I had not been honest toward her as I should." Stepan Dmitrievitch lifted his shoulders in an expressive shrug.

"What did you expect?" he said. "He did the same thing for you once before."

"But to have her go off like this—without a word!" protested Ivan Egorovitch mournfully. Stepan Dmitrievitch put his arm around him and patted him softly on the back.

"Is it any worse for you than it is for me?" he asked gently. "You know that I have wanted her for myself."

"Did she say that she was coming back?" asked Ivan Egorovitch suddenly.

"No, I asked her and she said she did not know her father's plans."

"Well, I have lost her, I suppose," said Ivan Egorovitch bitterly. "I might have known it was too good to last!" Stepan Dmitrievitch, whose chances had not been so good, was not so strongly moved by the event.

"Cheer up," he said. "We have still each other yet. I shall see more of you than I have

been doing, and I am not sure but I have been a little jealous of her, ever since she came.'' He threw his arm again around Ivan Egorovitch, and flushed girlishly as he looked into his eyes. Ivan Egorovitch was pleased that he should so greatly care, and putting his arms around him, kissed him on both cheeks.

''No matter how much I love Motrya,'' he said chokingly, ''she will never crowd you out of my heart.'' He was afraid to stay longer lest his great agitation should betray him into expressions outside of his control, and, breaking away from Stepan Dmitrievitch's embrace, he went rapidly away from him along the beach.

But though he had found comfort in the tie thus sentimentally renewed, the consolation was not strong enough to drive his trouble from his mind. He went the full length of his round and carried out with feverish accuracy the tasks he had been set to do. But his attention to his work was perfunctory at best, and when, at the last, he came to where he had earlier planned to find Motrya, his inclination set his duty fairly to one side and he stopped to talk with Tatiana Vassilievna and see what she would say. The

consolation she was pleased to offer brought him small relief.

"It is your own fault!" she said bluntly. "Why did you not come back last night and tell me you had failed? Here I was up till midnight, skimming my brains to keep them clear so I could help you, and not a sign of you was there to be seen. I lost my sleep and lost my temper, and that to me is worse than it is to you to lose your girl!"

"But, Tatiana," he persisted appealingly, "what shall I do about it now?"

"Oh, sit down and cry for her!" she answered crossly. "It may be that weeping will bring her back!" She was so palpably unsympathetic that the young man went disconsolately away.

He drooped so visibly and was so absent-minded as he worked, that Mikhail Etolin could not but notice. The sudden departure of Peter Efimovitch and his daughter furnished him the necessary cue and he questioned the young man with such kindness and sympathetic tact that he forgot his pride and laid bare the inmost recesses of his sore heart.

"That is not so bad," said the lieutenant

when he had heard it all. "It will look different to her when she has had time to think. I have an extra interest in this, in that the father seems to have been in league with the devil-priest to try to bring me down, and I should like to checkmate him if I could. You will have to wait till I can get about, but after that I think we can find some pretext for sending you along to Yakutat."

Cheered by this promise, Ivan Egorovitch turned with new courage to his work. As much as possible, he put the thought of his trouble behind him and gave his whole mind to what he had to do. But the pleasure of life was gone for him and he lived to all intents on his hope. Stepan Dmitrievitch, magnanimously forgetful of the rivalry between them, shadowed him day and night in large-minded effort to assuage his grief. Varenka Petrovna looked at him with wistful eyes, but he had taken unreasonable dislike to her as the author of his trouble with her sister, and kept himself resentfully aloof. Tatiana Vassilievna was still sulky and inclined to scorn, and the lieutenant's condition showed no promise of immediate change.

Four days passed thus, while his impatience grew and then, all unexpectedly, he found relief in a way of which he had not thought. The regular boat from Yakutat arrived, and, though he had hoped for it longingly, it brought no word for him from the girl he loved. But when Mikhail Etolin opened the despatches that it brought, he called for Ivan Egorovitch with a thoughtful face.

"My friend, the priest, has been having a thrust at you," he said, "and your friend who has run away has put him in the way of its accomplishment. He has formally complained to Aleksander Nicolaievitch, the commandant at Yakutat, that you have stolen his bell!"

"But I did not!" cried the young man in astonishment. "I could not find it when I looked."

"I know that," replied the lieutenant with a grin, "but since it has been put as it has, you will have to stand trial for it." Ivan Egorovitch's hope warmed up at once.

"Here or there?" he demanded breathlessly.

"It is entirely within my right to hold it here and I am jealous, on the whole, of my prerogative. But the fact that the complaint was filed

at Yakutat is proof that they did not intend it should be tried by me. You see it is my case as well as yours. They could not go behind the judgment that I gave, but they would surely talk about the punishment I should award and, on the whole, I think you had better let them try you there." It was the first time Ivan Egorovitch had been brought to pause by the restraining arm of the law, and the gravity of the situation was reflected in his face. The lieutenant saw it and pretended to misunderstand.

"I will try you here, though, if you do not want to go," he said teasingly.

"No, I will go," returned the young man hastily. "I was only thinking what would happen when I was brought up before a stranger at the other end. You know the facts, but there the accusers will be two."

"I will arrange that," said the lieutenant. "I know Aleksander Nicolaievitch personally, and he will take my word. I will write a letter to go with you that will tell all the truth." The young man's face lighted and he gave a little impatient move.

"When can you send me out?" he demanded eagerly.

"If I am well enough, you can go to-morrow, but I should feel better about it if you would wait for the regular boat."

"You are good to me, your Well-born," said the young man gratefully. "I will, of course, wait till the big *bidarka* goes." Nevertheless, his heart chafed under the delay, and he exerted himself so assiduously in seeing that no service was omitted that might restore the lieutenant to health, that Mikhail Etolin watched him in the performance with sardonic chuckles of delight.

His hopes, however, of immediate departure, were doomed to disappointment in the end. Mikhail Etolin left all the details of his regular work to the young man, that he might reap the full reward of rest. The only thing with which he charged himself was the preparation of the letter Ivan Egorovitch was to take to clear his skirts. Even this excitement proved too much for him in the end. He had scarcely finished it, when he began to show symptoms of a return of his complaint. This time, there was the added burden of a sharp pain in the heart, and by midnight he was distinctly worse.

CHAPTER XII

THE PASSING OF MIKHAIL

It is a saying of the peasants that the man who can not die by daybreak must wait until noon, and this, like other proverbs, has roots that spring from truth. Souls seem to slip more freely in the hour that just precedes the dawn, while always with the sun there springs a stir of hope that warms the spirit into a new hold on life. When, therefore, the morning whitened and the lieutenant was still alive, the watchers round him felt that he had passed his crisis for the time, and had perhaps another chance to mend.

It had not been an easy struggle in the night. With the first symptom of collapse, Ivan Egorovitch had summoned Tatiana Vassilievna and his blood-brother to his aid, and the three by turns had sat beside the sick man and ministered to his needs.

There was really small service to be done.

The pain, which at the first had brought out the beads of sweat on Mikhail Etolin's face, had lasted only a little time, and then had passed away. At least, if it came again, it was after the lieutenant had gone beyond the point of showing outwardly the suffering he felt, and so remained to all appearances callous to its pangs.

They had brought him on his mattress out to the larger room and there he lay and fought for air all through the lingering watches of the night. There was no one of his attendants who to this time had had the care of one so wholly sick, and the lieutenant's great weakness came to them as the sign of a dissolution sure and ready at the door. It did not seem that any man could slip so far from the safe heights of health and hope to climb again back to his first estate.

Ivan Egorovitch was perhaps the one the least disturbed. He had seen the lieutenant in like straits before and had found the experience trying to his nerves. But he had seen, too, recovery follow the attack, and so was now prepared to face the crisis with a philosophy that favored hope.

Stepan Dmitrievitch made no pretense but that he was disturbed. With hands pressed together, he stood helplessly about and listened with a look akin to fear to the stertorous breathing of the sick man on the bed. Where he was told, he performed the task imposed with awkward readiness. But all the remaining minutes found him anxious in his mind, so that when he met the eyes of his associates, he was embarrassed and confused, and stood repeating with a mournful shaking of the head:

"Akh! It is dreadful! Something must be done!"

Tatiana Vassilievna found her femininity a resource, and was perhaps the most composed and helpful of the three. It was a shock to her when she first looked at Mikhail Etolin and saw the changes his disease had wrought. He had grown haggard in the days he had been in bed, and his skin hung flabbily about his face and neck, like a garment that was too large. But her heart was touched that he should lie so helpless and depressed, and she set herself busily to add to his comfort as she could.

She sent Ivan Egorovitch for water and the proper cloths, and commissioned Stepan Dmi-

trievitch to renew the coals in the samovar and blow it till it boiled.

"He should have care," she said. "There is no harm in being comfortable when sick." When Ivan Egorovitch returned, she had him stand and hold the wooden dish while she bathed the lieutenant's face and neck and straightened the disorder of his hair.

"There," she said with satisfaction when she had finished with the work, "if we can make him over to be as different inside as we have out, there will be hope of him at once!"

As a means to this inner regulation, she took a cup of boiling water into which vodka had been poured and fed him the mixture slowly with a spoon. The lieutenant's eyes grew brighter under the stimulation, and a trace of color began to flutter in his cheeks. His mind was clear, despite the failure of his bodily powers, and, though he did not speak, he fixed his eyes on Tatiana Vassilievna in grateful recognition of her help and followed her movements continually with his solemn gaze. She took a real delight in his rejuvenation and cried out eagerly at each symptom of advance.

"He will do well," she said, "now that he has

made up his mind. See how easily he moves his hands!" Mikhail Etolin caught a sudden courage from the contagion of her hope and picked up heart to make a stronger fight.

At midnight, the two men urged on Tatiana Vassilievna that she lie down and sleep, and after a pretense of refusal, she reluctantly agreed. Whether the withdrawal of her touch and word took from the lieutenant the support required to hold firm his grasp on life, or else that, in its progress, the disease that held him gripped more strongly at different times, there is no doubt that when she left the scene his interest in life declined. And so, when Ivan Egorovitch wakened her after some three hours' rest, she knew at once by his look that the sick man had not prospered in the time.

The rousing had come through a touch on the shoulder, and she had sat up promptly and stretched to bring herself awake. Then, catching the serious expression on the young man's face, she became suddenly attentive and fixed him with her eyes.

"Is Mikhail Etolin worse?" she asked abruptly. He nodded silently with compressed lips. She rose without further question and

tiptoed over so that she could see. A glance sufficed to show her how greatly the lieutenant had changed. Her brows knit compassionately, and she crossed herself as she took cognizance of the ashy pallor of his face, his pinched features and the pitiful expression of his mouth.

"You must go for the priest," she said decisively. "He must have communion, and it is too great a risk to wait."

"I dare not," returned Ivan Egorovitch positively. "It was Mikhail Sergeievitch's strict orders that Simeon Gvosdef should not be allowed to come." Tatiana Vassilievna considered for a moment in perplexity, and then turned aside.

"I will pray for him, then," she said softly. "There does not seem to be anything else to do."

She went across to where the dark ikon hung on the wall, and, going down on her knees, began to repeat in sibilant undertones such supplications as she knew. Her nature, though, was not one to find a permanent relief in prayer, and in a few moments she was up and back again beside the bed.

With as much care as if she thought he was

asleep, she laid her hand on Mikhail Etolin's chest above his heart and waited breathlessly to feel it beat. It moved so feebly and with such palpable delay that the fear was strengthened within her that he was entirely beyond human aid.

She bent above him and spoke to him, but he did not open his eyes. She remained thus close to him for several minutes and smoothed his hair sympathetically with her hand. Then she straightened herself and the two men saw that her cheeks were wet with tears.

"It is hard, indeed," she said tremulously, "to die without a priest. But as there is no church and Simeon Gvosdef can not come, God surely ought to listen when we speak for Mikhail Sergeievitch here, just as well as if we knelt before the holy gates."

Under the ikon on the wall there was a crucifix hung by a metal chain. She took this down and carried it to Mikhail Etolin's bed.

"Kiss this and God will know you trust your soul to Him," she said, and pressed it to his lips. The touch of the cold metal roused the sinking man, and he opened his eyes and fixed them inquiringly on her face. He understood

at once her action and her tears, and how extreme, in doing it, they must have guessed his strait to be. But his brave soul was not content yet to give up the fight. A wavering gleam of defiance came into his eyes, and with a supreme effort he turned away his head. Tatiana Vasilievna gave a low cry and snatched away the cross.

"He is not ready," she said in a tone that was almost awe. She put the crucifix behind her and stood watching him with kindling eyes. Then, stooping down so that he should surely hear, she spoke to him with the thrill of conflict in her voice.

"Hold to your fight!" she cried. "You will win yet if your courage keeps." The lieutenant made no answer beyond a momentary flutter of his eyelids, but the determination of his stubborn spirit had entered into the woman's heart and she set herself with renewed energy to bolster up his lagging body so that it should not prove unworthy of his soul.

She found his feet were clammy to the touch and wound them in hot cloths so they would be warmed. His hands were blue and she rubbed them till the blood began to move. And

when he could not take the stimulant she offered, she forced it drop by drop between his unwilling teeth.

Her two companions scarcely caught the fire of her enthusiasm, but they bent themselves cheerfully to her assistance and spared no pains to make their service good. The sick man lay inert and his uplift toward recovery was so slow that even Tatiana Vassilievna, despite her stout assertion, grew a whit dismayed.

"If it were any other time of night!" she said dejectedly. "He could not choose a harder time to try." But there is an end even to the slow-moving darkness. While they hoped and labored the shadows about them softened and grew less distinct. The color seemed to go out of things around them, and they could see the familiar objects of the room, pallid and gray, like ghosts of their real selves.

They welcomed the light with friendly eyes, and Tatiana Vassilievna, tiptoeing quietly to a window, opened it and let in the fresh morning air. It was a relief to her after the close silence of the room to hear the increasing stir of nature awakening outside. She stood for a long time gazing out into the dawn, and when the first

rays of the sun broke in through the window and made a yellow streak across the floor, she turned to her companions with a face that seemed to have caught illumination from its light.

"We have beaten death!" she cried with a queer note of triumph in her voice. The two men stirred responsively in their places and, moved by the infection of her restlessness, Stepan Dmitrievitch stretched himself, and rising, began to drift aimlessly about. There was a knock at the door, and being the nearest, he opened it and found Varenka Petrovna waiting to come in. Tatiana Vassilievna went to her at once.

"It is you, is it?" she said. "I was thinking you would come. I can not go, though. You will have to bring him here."

"How is Mikhail Etolin?" asked the younger woman in a whisper.

"Come in and see. If he is here at all it is because we have held him with our hands!" Varenka Petrovna's curiosity tempted her inside, and keeping close to the older woman, she crossed the room and, pausing beside Mikhail Etolin's bed, stood still and looked at him. It

was not a pleasing vision, and she drew down her eyebrows and pressed her fingers to her lips.

"Do you think he will die?" she whispered. Tatiana Vassilievna's sense of triumph stirred in her like wine.

"He does not dare!" she said sententiously. "I should just like to see him try!" The girl's curiosity was quickly satisfied and she retreated to the door.

"I will bring Grinya," she said, as if in apology for her haste, and, without apparent notice of the two others present, slipped silently away. When she returned, Tatiana Vassilievna took the child, and seating herself on the lieutenant's bench outside the door, she suckled it while she talked with Varenka Petrovna in low tones. When she had finished, she sent the child away, but remained, herself, seated outside in the sun, without a motion to go in. When she did return to the sick chamber it was evident to Ivan Egorovitch that she had something on her mind.

"You told me, did you not," she said to him, "that this trouble came to Mikhail Sergeievitch because he was afraid?"

"Yes," said the young man tentatively, "but what of that?"

"This," she said, "that since there is no doctor at the post and no priest that can be called, it falls to us to do what should be done. Would it not be worth while for me to try and 'pour out fear'?" Ivan Egorovitch raised his eyebrows and considered before he spoke.

"What is the use?" he said at last. "Mikhail Sergeievitch knows already who it is that has brought him harm."

"That does not matter. If he recognizes the figure the fear will go away."

"Perhaps," said the young man doubtfully, "though I have small faith in it myself. And besides," he added, "even if it makes a figure at the last, he is too weak to speak its name."

"Well," returned Tatiana Vassilievna with some heat, "he certainly will not speak it if the pouring is not done, and I can not see that it would do harm to try."

"No, I suppose not," assented Ivan Egorovitch reluctantly. "But can you do it as it should be done?"

"Of course. I have done it more than once at home."

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"Very well," he answered, giving up the fight, "I hope it will do good. What will you need beside the wax and stone?" Tatiana Vassilievna examined the samovar carefully before she spoke.

"Nothing but a copper dish," she answered. "We can use these coals here for a fire."

"I will get the stone," said Stepan Dmitrievitch with sudden interest. "There is one near the boat-house that is large enough and flat." He went at once about his errand and Tatiana Vassilievna continued with the other arrangements for carrying out her plans.

She drew a bench up near to the platform on which Mikhail Etolin lay and covered it neatly with a cloth. Then, turning over the tray of the samovar she placed it on the improvised table and poured out on it the heap of coals. Beside it she laid a knife, a cake of wax and the copper basin that Ivan Egorovitch had supplied. Beyond these, then, by direction, was deposited the stone when Stepan Dmitrievitch brought it in.

When all was arranged the two men stood back and Tatiana Vassilievna, with the composure of full confidence, made ready to begin.

With much gentleness, she raised the lieutenant and propped him up with pillows so that he could see. Then, after standing a moment in silent self-communion, she lifted the cake of wax and, holding it above her head as the priest holds the host, she turned with it to Mikhail Etolin's bedside, and pushing open his clothing laid it directly on his breast.

"The fear is yours and the fight is yours," she said solemnly, "and if this is to tell the truth at last, it must first catch its warmth from the courage you have within." She paused in her apostrophe and waited with her hands clasped round the yellow lump, as if to keep within it the heat it should acquire. Mikhail Etolin displayed no interest in what she did, beyond an uneasy movement, as if even the slight weight put upon him by it were for the time a pain. She said nothing more while she waited, and, after a little space, lifted the cake again, and, holding her hands jealously around it, turned with it quickly to the bench and deposited it in the shallow copper pan. Taking up the knife, with two swift strokes she cut the cake into four even parts.

"Two for the north and south and two for the

east and west," she announced in a clear steady voice. "As all are even and of no choice, so from no single point shall error come." She lifted the basin by its long handle as she spoke and set it carefully upon the coals. Then, falling back a pace, she stood and watched it with expectant interest, and for the moment there was silence in the room.

The wax softened with the heat, and from under it liquid streams began to spread out unevenly across the pan. She followed them intently, bending forward with absorbed interest to watch them as they moved. As they approached the edge, the hotter surface of the pan lifted them into motion and the mass began to simmer and stir with a dry crackling sound.

At the first note Tatiana Vassilievna straightened herself stiffly and stood with lips parted, as if awaiting an expected sign. What it was no one heard besides herself, but when it came she recognized it, and, lifting up her head so that her throat was free, she drew in a little sobbing breath and began to sing.

The first note was tremulous and uncertain, and had an impersonal quality as if she were a listener to it rather than the one by whom

it was made. It had a startling effect on Ivan Egorovitch and Stepan Dmitrievitch, though they had known beforehand what she was going to do, and, moved by its vibrant thrill, Mikhail Etolin stirred uneasily and opened his eyes.

The first tone was followed by another, stronger and more resonant, but still like the sound of a wind-instrument rather than a human voice. Then the notes began to come faster, growing in intensity and depth until they merged into a stately sort of tune.

"There was a fear at heart, a bitter fear!" she sang, and the charge was like a solemn arraignment of the world. Her voice was a low contralto, full and sweet. It was hoarse in the lower register and never ventured high. But it was charged with a dramatic intensity, a pulse of feeling that carried it irresistibly to the hearts of those who listened.

It was a melancholy strain at first, somber and pathetic, as she declared the trouble of Mikhail Etolin's soul. It had sympathy in it and fear, and a pathetic sadness that bordered on appeal. Ivan Egorovitch and Stepan Dmitrievitch glanced uneasily at each other and the lieutenant, moving nervously, punctuated

his acute attentiveness with a long responsive sigh.

Tatiana Vassilievna heard it, and looked hastily around. Her eyes brightened significantly, and she threw herself with renewed spirit into the rendering of her song. It changed to a firmer measure and a more persistent note. There was no longer the plaintive melancholy with which it had begun. Instead, there began to breathe in it a defiant strain, a self-assertion that reached out boldly and took a steadying grip on the soul. There was the courage of effort in it, and a passionate insistence that was almost insolent in its parade of power.

Tatiana Vassilievna, leaning over the melting wax, had forgotten her audience entirely, and was pouring out her soul in the delivery of her song. Ivan Egorovitch sat rigidly upright, his hands clasped in his lap and his face illuminated with the fire of awakened feeling. Stepan Dmitrievitch looked steadily out through the open window without change of pose, and Mikhail Etolin, nervously picking at his covers with his hands, devoured the singer fiercely with his solemn eyes.

The tension was too great to be for any time sustained. The song was fitted to a purpose, and when that was fulfilled it came promptly to an end. Tatiana Vassilievna, looking down, saw that the last particle of wax had melted and run down, and, lifting her hands as if in invocation, she brought the singing to a close.

It stopped abruptly, on a high plaintive note, and before her breathless audience fairly realized that it was done she stooped, and, lifting up the copper pan, poured the liquid wax slowly out upon the stone. She shut her eyes as she did so that she might in no way influence the shape in which it cooled. And when it was all out she set the pan aside, and turned with eager interest to see what it had made.

The two men, waking from the spell that had held them bound, tiptoed eagerly to her side, and the three stood with their heads close together, studying the outline of the cooling mass. It needed but one glance to show Tatiana Vassilievna that her pouring had resulted in success. With a little cry of triumph she stood upright, and with her finger on her lips as a caution to the necessary silence, she looked at the two men the question she did not wish to speak.

Stepan Dmitrievitch was slow of intuition, and returned her inquiry with a puzzled stare, but Ivan Egorovitch caught her meaning almost as she looked. He nodded sympathetically, and stooping, ran with his forefinger the outline around the wax to call attention to the resemblance he had guessed. Tatiana Vassilievna nodded in her turn, and then, with a sudden sobering of her features, looked confidently at Mikhail Etolin as he lay.

"He will see it, too," she whispered, "if only he can find the strength to speak." Picking up the stone, she carried it carefully to Mikhail Etolin's side and held it up so that he could see.

"Tell me," she said, "what is there pictured here that has served to bring you fear?" The lieutenant's solemn eyes went to her face and then slowly descended to the stone. He took but an instant to his scrutiny, and when he raised them again she saw in them the answering intelligence that she had wished.

"Speak it!" she commanded. "It is necessary it should be said in words." Mikhail Etolin's lips moved faintly, but he made no articulate sound. Tatiana Vassilievna set down

the stone gently and came more closely to his side.

"Try it again," she said encouragingly, and bent so that her ear was almost against his mouth. The lieutenant gathered himself for the effort, and strove earnestly to make himself heard. She remained bent over him for fully a minute listening for his words, and then lifted up her head, and, looking at the others, laughed a contented happy laugh.

"He will get well," she said simply. "He said it was Simeon Gvosdef's bell." Mikhail Etolin heard her, as well as the others, and her confidence invested him with new life. His face warmed out of its ghastly pallor, and he began to exert the conscious balance of the muscles that is the outward measure between life and death.

By ten o'clock he bade so fair to live that Ivan Egorovitch, leaving the care of him to Tatiana Vassilievna and his blood-brother, went out for a hasty round among the men. Stepan Dmitrievitch, stretching himself full length upon a bench, went promptly off to sleep. Tatiana Vassilievna, herself, sitting where she could see the sick man if he stirred, had to force her hands

to move vigorously at her knitting to keep awake. Between the quiet and the growing heat, she found it even then no easy task. There was a monotony in the sights and sounds around her that insidiously tempted to repose. The long, even breathing of the sleeper on the bench, the rhythmic swaying of the shadows cast by the sunlight on the floor, and the unvarying song of a bird somewhere outside that repeated endlessly three notes at differences of minor thirds, all served to work on her imagination so that, without her will, at times her eyes shut unconsciously.

The lapses were not total, for at no time did she wholly cease to knit. But the motion through long practice had become largely automatic, and for moments at least she missed what happened in the room.

Awaking guiltily from one of these, she stole a look at Mikhail Etolin to see if he had seen, and was startled into full consciousness by the expression of his face. He was still propped on his pillow so that he was half upright, but his head had fallen forward on his chest, his jaw had dropped so that his lips were drawn apart, and he was gazing out into the room behind her

with a hopeless look of utter terror and despair.

With a little exclamation of astonishment, she rose swiftly and turned in the direction marked out by his eyes. There was no trouble then in fixing on the reason for his fear, for just inside the door, where he had come while she was dozing, she saw Simeon Gvosdef, the priest.

He was in his full robes and carried the elements of the sacrament in his hands. He stood gazing doubtfully round with his shifty glance, with an eye first on the sick man and then on the door, so that should occasion demand it, he might take refuge in flight.

Tatiana Vassilievna was uncertain what to do. She saw that the priest's presence was terrifying to Mikhail Etolin, but she had no certain order to refuse him entrance, and not only did she feel the pressing need of priestly comfort for her patient, but in her heart there moved unconsciously the feminine impulse of submission to a priest. She stood irresolute and found herself thinking vaguely how the light from the door behind Simeon Gvosdef brought out the color of his lilac robe.

The priest took instant advantage of her inde-

cision and stepped boldly forward into the room. Setting on the table the emblems of the host, he came nearer to the bed, his hand outstretched in the usual priestly blessing.

"Peace be to this house," he said with unctuous softness. He had lost his timid air and spoke with the calm assurance of his cloth. Tatiana Vassilievna bent her head and crossed herself in answer to the greeting, but when he came nearer and made as if he would pass by her to Mikhail Etolin's bed, she stepped in front of him and checked him in his advance.

"Wait," she said with a show of authority. "What are you going to do?" The priest gave back at once with fawning submissiveness, and stood with his eyes cast down.

"There is the need that he be shrived," he said in a low voice. "Without it he is not fit to die."

"Wait till it is time," she responded scornfully. "He is not going to die now."

"How do you know?" he demanded searchingly. Tatiana Vassilievna's red face grew redder, but she held steadily to the truth.

"We have poured out fear," she said defiantly, "and the answer left no room for

doubt.'' The priest's little eyes narrowed as they searched her face. They studied her keenly for a moment, and then, wandering away in search of evidence elsewhere, lighted promptly on the wax-covered stone. He bent to it eagerly and studied it with feverish query in his eyes. He saw in it at once the resemblance that the rest had found, but the recognition seemed to bring to him a different thought from theirs, for he raised himself with a look of triumph on his face.

''You read well,'' he said with quiet scorn, ''but you do not read it rightly or enough.'' Then, turning away from Tatiana Vassilievna, he addressed himself directly to the man on the bed.

''Do you believe, Mikhail Sergeievitch, that because you found the strength to recognize the outline on the stone that it will serve to add a further license to your miserable days? Do you not see that in that figure it was God who spoke and that He let you see it, not as a respite, but to remind you that He was about to carry out His words?'' Mikhail Etolin did not answer, but his eyelids quivered spasmodically and he stirred uncomfortably in his place. Simeon

"I am here to give you this before you go." *Page 303*

Gvosdef watched him eagerly for a moment and then turned sharply to the woman at his side.

"Stand back!" he cried almost fiercely. "Would you take it on your soul to come between him and God?" Tatiana Vassilievna retreated involuntarily, and again crossed herself against harm. Simeon Gvosdef, with his head held high, passed by her without a further word, and came so close to Mikhail Etolin that he could have touched him if he would.

"It is the end," he said solemnly. "It has come, and, as I told you, I am here to give you this before you go." His face was lighted with his old fire of possession, and he smiled as he put his hand inside his gown. When he took it out again he had in it a folded passport, which he held up for the lieutenant to see.

"You thought to slip away alone, Mikhail Sergeievitch," he said accusingly, "but in spite of all you will have to go with your arraignment in your hand. If you are innocent, you need fear no harm. But if you are guilty, God will know what punishment to give you for your crime." He stood for a moment holding up the slip. Then, with a movement that was almost imperceptible, his hand began to

stretch toward that of the man lying on the bed.

Mikhail Etolin had never for a moment taken his eyes from his tormentor's face, and as he watched him the look of fascinated horror in them deepened and grew more intense, and his lips drew back until he showed his teeth like a wild beast brought to bay. The silent duel lasted till the two hands met. Simeon Gvosdef gave a little shudder at the contact and pushed the paper fiercely down into the other's hand.

"Moissei!" he cried sharply. "Moissei!" and his tone was almost a sob. He remained bent down above his enemy, his eyes fixed devouringly on him in anticipation of the coming change. Behind him, Tatiana Vassilievna was crying hysterically to herself, and Stepan Dmitrievitch, undisturbed by the drama about him, snored noisily on his bench.

For some minutes the lieutenant's eyes returned defiantly Simeon Gvosdef's stare, but little by little the light went out of them, and at last the lids went down. The priest began praying audibly to himself, but he did not move nor take away his eyes till he was sure, from the dropped jaw and sunken head, that Mikhail

Etolin was surely dead. Then he reached forward and drew out the paper from the lieutenant's hand. Straightening himself, he turned with a bitter smile and held it open so that Tatiana Vassilievna could see.

"It was his fear that killed him," he said quietly. "See! The page is blank! I make no accusation of him on it there at all!"

CHAPTER XIII

LOVE AND GOOD FAITH

Two days after Mikhail Etolin's death, Ivan Egorovitch shook from his feet the Ltua dust and went out by the regular boat to Yakutat. The intervening time had served to see the lieutenant put safely under ground, though, through protest of the priest, he found asylum on the mainland instead of on the island, where Moissei Gvosdef had been placed.

By virtue of his association with the lieutenant, it fell naturally to Ivan Egorovitch to take up his work. But there was love in his heart, and his blood was young, and the sober promise of the advancement to be gained by staying on in Mikhail Etolin's shoes weighed lighter with him than the desire to look again into Motrya Petrovna's eyes.

"You can look after things as well as I," he said to Stepan Dmitrievitch. "We are both so young that it is sure neither of us will be

billeted permanently in the place. But you will have a chance to show what you can do and to make a record that will help you later on." Stepan Dmitrievitch listened to the plan with less satisfaction than his blood-brother would have wished.

"I am not so sure," he said cautiously. "I had been thinking, perhaps, that if you stayed here, I should take a run up to Yakutat myself." Ivan Egorovitch's face flushed and he drew up his upper lip.

"I think that I am entitled to first chance," he said with some rigidity. "And, besides, I have been ordered to go up for trial, and therefore have no choice." Stepan Dmitrievitch's face clouded, and he yielded the point with ill-concealed discontent.

"How long shall you be gone?" he asked moodily.

"If I succeed, it may be some time. If I fail, I shall be back by the next boat." The older brother kept his eyes averted and stood rubbing the palms of his hands together slowly, while he gathered the courage to speak what was in his mind.

"I do not quite know why I stand aside for

you as I am doing in this matter," he said finally. "I suppose it is because you have always been quicker and more decided in things than I am, and it has got to be a habit with me to give up my own opinion and follow in your lead. I am not complaining now about the compact that we made, though I have a feeling somehow that in making it you were not quite candid, in that you knew you had the advantage at the time. You certainly have come nearer to success than I, and though I am a fool, I suppose, to do it, I am going to give you this one more chance. I will stay and let you go to Yakutat—but you have got to promise me this one thing. You will remember that it was agreed between us that if either one found he could not get what he desired he would help the other in such way as he could. I am helping you now, and I wish you to promise that if, when you see Motrya Petrovna, you find she is not for you, you will help me cheerfully to push my claim." Ivan Egorovitch's hand came out at once and his affectionate sympathy shone out through his eyes.

"You did not need to ask," he said quickly. "If I fail, I will send or bring you word."

Stepan Dmitrievitch shook his head.

"That is not enough," he said. "The word would take time in coming, and it might then be too late. I am going to write in a letter what I want to say, and you shall take it with you under promise that, if you fail, you will put it in her hand." Ivan Egorovitch had come so near to certainty with Motrya Petrovna that unconsciously he thought of her already as his own.

"You might as decently ask a man to carry to his wife a letter from a lover," he said resentfully. "I could not do it!"

"Very well," said Stepan Dmitrievitch with quiet dignity. "Then I shall either send it by some one else or go with you and make my plea myself."

Ivan Egorovitch thought quickly of the chances in the case. It gave him a queer feeling at the stomach to think that any man, even his blood-brother, should address Motrya Petrovna in the terms he knew this letter would contain. And yet if he refused to carry it, Stepan Dmitrievitch was capable of taking action that might seriously disarrange his plans. The advantage of keeping matters in his own hand was so palpably apparent that he swal-

lowed his resentment with a gulp and slapped Stepan Dmitrievitch smartly on the back.

"Forgive me!" he cried. "I forgot for the moment she was not already mine. Write your letter, and, on my honor, I will hold your cause next only to my own."

They talked no more about it, but when the hour for sailing came, Stepan Dmitrievitch brought the letter properly addressed and confided it to his unwilling messenger, without further instruction as to how it should be used. Ivan Egorovitch placed it with the document given him by Mikhail Etolin, which contained the statement of his case, and strove to put its possession from his mind. But he never felt it inside his coat without a little angry thrill, and more than once the resentful impulse came to him to lose it by dropping it secretly overboard into the sea.

His thought of his coming trial was without fear for the result. Simeon Gvosdef went up on the same boat as himself, ordered no doubt to come and give substantiation to his charge. But the priest was a changed man, now that his self-constituted mission had come successfully to an end. He sat in the bow of the

boat in absent-minded self-communion and scarcely seemed to see or hear those who were around him in the craft. The sailors on the boat avoided him. There was something uncanny to them about his connection with Mikhail Etolin's death, and for the most part they were content to leave him to himself.

When the boat arrived he was the first man ashore, and went at once to the house of the commandant. Ivan Egorovitch was not long behind, and, waiting till Simeon Gvosdef was done, found Aleksander Nicolaievitch just finishing his work before his midday meal.

The commandant was a short man, spare in build, with a kindly eye and a long beard that was already turning white. He looked up inquiringly as Ivan Egorovitch came in, and seeing that he was a stranger, bowed to him with friendly ceremony and motioned him to a seat.

"Where are you from?" he asked with evident curiosity. "I do not remember to have seen you here before." The young man bowed respectfully, but remained standing in his place.

"I am Ivan Egorovitch Nilof," he said.

"You will perhaps remember that you summoned me here from Ltua to answer to a charge." The commandant's eyes lifted abruptly to his face, and he looked at the young man searchingly as if, by this means, he expected to read out of him the truth.

"Ah!" he said. "You are the young man who was accused by the priest." He continued to look his visitor over curiously, with an air of puzzled interest.

"How does it come then," he said, "that you are here without a guard?" Ivan Egorovitch smiled and lifted his shoulders deprecatingly.

"Mikhail Sergeievitch knew me so well that, when the order came, he did not put me under arrest. After his death the command devolved on me, and I was sufficiently sure of myself, that I did not think it necessary to appoint a guard to bring me in." There was an answering gleam of humor in Aleksander Nicolaievitch's eyes, but he kept his gravity of face and went on impassively.

"I have just now heard from Simeon Gvosdef that Mikhail Etolin is dead," he said, "and if the priest is to be believed, the end was due to a strange visitation of God." Ivan Egorovitch

took a quick step forward and his hands went out in eager denial of the charge.

"It was not God, but Simeon Gvosdef that brought Mikhail Etolin to his end!" he cried excitedly. "He did it to punish him, because he thought the lieutenant had killed his son. Mikhail Etolin had trouble with his heart and could not breathe, and the priest made shift to bring on the attacks until he wore him to his death. He is a fiend," he added with conviction. The commandant turned up his long beard with his hand, and bit the end of it absently as he listened.

"And the death of the priest's son," he said after a little pause, "was it really a murder as was claimed?"

"No! It was a legal execution for a just cause. Mikhail Etolin's only connection with it was that, as a judge, it came to him to order the thing done." Aleksander Nicolaievitch considered the statement in silence for some moments before he spoke.

"And you," he said, "did you take the priest's bell as he has charged?"

"No!" replied the young man indignantly. "It was lost in the water while I was trying to

save him from being drowned." The commandant's keen eyes fixed themselves on Ivan Egorovitch's face with a gravity that was almost accusation.

"Have you any proof of this besides your own word?" he demanded sternly.

"Yes," said the young man. "There is this letter that Mikhail Etolin wrote the day before he died." He put the packet in Aleksander Nicolaievitch's hand and waited impatiently while it was being read. The commandant made no sign until he had reached the end, and even then, for some moments, he sat thinking silently, as if trying to arrange the details of the matter in his mind. When he turned to Ivan Egorovitch, it was with a less severe expression on his face, and he waved his hand again toward the seat he had pointed out at first.

"Sit down," he said, "and let us talk this matter over as we should."

The young man accepted gratefully the proffered courtesy, and awaited in silence what Aleksander Nicolaievitch would do next. The commandant folded up the letter carefully and filed it in a compartment of his desk. He leaned back in his chair, so that his glance went directly

out above the young man's head, and with the balls of his fingers he drummed lightly on the wood.

"It is a curious thing," he said finally, "and a strange one. When the priest first made the charge I had the feeling that there was something behind it that had not yet appeared." He paused for a moment and then added irrelevantly, "Mikhail Etolin was a good man." Ivan Egorovitch remained silent, though he bowed a respectful assent. The commandant continued in his reverie, and seemed to have forgotten the young man was there at all. When he did speak it was as if he were answering a question put to him by some one else.

"There is the trouble," he said impatiently. "Whichever way I decide it, some one is going to complain. If I punish you, you are going to think it unjust. If I do not punish you, there will be a scandal with the church, and every one will hear of it from here to Russia. No!" he said with a sudden shake of the head. "There must be a punishment of some kind. Not because you are guilty and deserve that it should be imposed, but because otherwise they will always say I was unjust. I'll tell you what we

will do," he cried with sudden animation. "You do not know any one, do you, here in Yakutat?"

"No!" said the young man with astonishment.

"Then it will not hurt you to stand on the stump. That is as easy a punishment as I could give. The customary fasting I shall not require. You shall come and eat with me this noon, and then go about your penance until dark."

It was an easy compromise, and while in his heart Ivan Egorovitch resented punishment at all, he brought himself obediently to agree to it. But it was a trial to him, that he must give up so many hours before beginning search for the girl he had come to find, and the inner disappointment showed like a shadow on his face. The commandant saw it, and rising, laid his hand upon his arm.

"I know it is hard," he said kindly, "but I believe it is the easiest way to bring the matter to an end. Will it help you to say that Mikhail Etolin has asked, and I am going to grant, that you shall go back to Ltua in his place? This, of course, is only temporary, but I shall ask at Arkangelsk that the appointment be confirmed.

No. No words about it. Come. It is time for us to go and eat." He drew the young man gently away and began to talk of other things. When the meal was finished the commandant went with him to the door.

"I am going to do by you as well as you have done by me," he said with a smile. "You came and delivered yourself without a guard to bring you in. Give me your word that, having found a stump, you will not leave it until dark, and I will trust you to go to punishment without crier or restraint or guard to set you out. I think you will find a stump yonder by that further house, which is cut so low that when you stand on it no one would know that you were off the ground. Report to me when you are done, and I will find you a place to sleep." The young man laughed and turned to him with grateful eyes.

"You are very good to me," he said. "You have my word that in all things I will carry out the sentence as I should."

He went out into the sunlight and moved leisurely across to the place the commandant had pointed out. He found the stump without difficulty, and recognized how careful Aleksan-

der Nicolaievitch had been in choosing it to protect him from unpleasantness in the task he had imposed. The tree had been cut off a few inches above the ground, and was large enough so that he could change position on it and move from side to side. More than that, it commanded a full view both of the post and the harbor at its foot.

Ivan Egorovitch took his place on it with a sense of amusement rather than of shame. He looked back at Aleksander Nicolaievitch's house to note if the commandant watched to see how his order was being carried out. But there was no one there in sight, and he felt a thrill of pride as he realized the trust that had been placed in him.

As the commandant had promised, he found much to see. The place was far more pretentious than the post that he had left, and, without the native village near the sea, must have sheltered nearly three hundred souls. The harbor, too, was full of great and small canoes, and a two-masted ship lay in among them with sails unloosed for drying, so that they hung in long festoons. A constant stream of smaller boats moved back and forth between the vessel

and the shore, and, in the clear air, he could hear from it the orders as they were shouted to the men.

Near-by there was more quiet, and less to occupy his mind. No one in the hamlet seemed to guess why he remained so steadfastly in the one small space. The native boys discovered him and paused, wide-eyed, to watch him where he stood. Once, a woman, moved by his unfamiliarity, stopped and regarded him with so fixed a gaze that he thought his secret surely published to the world. But her interest passed without a close approach, and after some disturbing moments she went quietly away.

For an hour his attention brought enough to occupy his mind, but after that the spectacle began to pall. There commenced to stir within him the impatient longing to be again about his search. And he found himself running with his eyes from house to house all over the little place, in the hope that somehow the recognition would come to him in which one Motrya Petrovna had found place.

It was a fruitless quest, however, and gradually he ceased to watch closely the things that passed about him and allowed himself to be-

come more and more preoccupied with what was passing in his mind.

And so it happened that when Motrya Petrovna did come out he did not see her and had no premonition of her presence until she was near at hand. She saw him first and stood still and looked at him without a word. Her first instinct seemed to be for flight, but, seeing that he was not conscious of her presence, she stood her ground and watched him intently.

He saw her after a minute and moved as if to go to her. But the recollection of his parole rose up in him and he checked himself and waited in his turn. She saw the struggle in him and misinterpreted it, and, after waiting a little time for him to come, lifted up her head proudly and went on as if about to pass him without recognition. He delayed until she was fully opposite him and her intention could not be misunderstood. Then with an effort he put down his pride and called to her.

"Motrya," he said, "are you not going to speak to me?" She stopped at once and turned to him and, as he had noticed before when she was excited, the color began to rise swiftly in her cheeks.

"Oh, it is you, then!" she said coolly. "You did not come to me and I thought it must be some one else."

"I could not come," returned the young man humbly. "I have given my word that I will stay here in this place." She listened with curiosity, and after a moment's hesitation came nearer, till she was within arm's length of where he stood. Then she saw the stump and comprehended.

"You are a prisoner," she said with the air of one interested simply by the fact rather than by any instinct of surprise or sympathy.

"Yes," he answered with constraint as rigid as her own. "I was brought here from Ltua to answer to the charge that I had stolen Simeon Gvosdef's bell." The girl's face clouded and she let her eyes go down.

"Oh," she said vaguely, "that is why you came!" Ivan Egorovitch felt his heart stir, for slight as the change in her was, it carried to him that she had been looking for his coming, though she had not owned the feeling as a real hope.

"That is the reason why I am a prisoner here," he said with such quietness as he could

command. "But I think you know the reason that, with you here, has made it impossible for me to stay away." She lifted her eyes to him in one quick glance, and then as quickly let them down again.

"The whole thing was foolish, I suppose," she said slowly, "but it seems to have served as well as another to bring punishment to you." He gave a little exclamation and nodded a vigorous assent.

"Punishment?" he cried. "There has been punishment for me every moment since you went away!" Motrya Petrovna did not look at him, but she made an impatient movement with her head.

"That is not what I meant," she said. "I was thinking of Simeon Gvosdef and the accusation that he made."

"But what I said is true, too," insisted the young man earnestly. "So true that I came all this way after you, because I was sure that when you had time to think it over, you yourself would feel it was a mistake." The girl's attitude remained as uncompromising as before and she resolutely turned away her face.

"Why were you not truthful with me, as you

made me think?'' she said, and there was an emphasis that was resentful in her voice. ''I think I could have forgiven the things themselves that happened, but the fact that you deceived me is not so easy to forget.'' It was on the young man's tongue to deny strenuously the charge she made. But he remembered vividly, how far, before, the same denial had set him from success, and so was chary of venturing on it now. He came as near to her as the limit of his prison would allow and bent forward eagerly to make appeal.

''Motrya,'' he said, ''in all these long days, have you not had time to think what it will mean for us both if we allow ourselves to drift apart?''

''Yes, I have thought of it,'' she answered quietly. ''Did you think it would be an easy thing for me to forget?''

''No! No! You could not!'' he cried impulsively. ''We have been too near! Ah, I knew you would remember,'' he added softly and put out his hands.

''Wait!'' she said. ''I did remember, Ivan. In these dreadful days I think there has come back to me every word and deed that ever

passed between us. I have thought of our promise and the happiness that was to come—but always at the end, Ivan, I have had to think what the prospect for that happiness really was, so long as between you and me there was not perfect trust."

"But you love me!" he broke in eagerly.

"Yes, that is true," she said. "I do love you—but that is not enough."

"Oh! It could be enough!" he cried wistfully.

"Yes," she answered. "I suppose that I could give it all, but would not that be rather hard on me?"

"But I would give so much!" he said. "Can you not believe that even if it were true that I failed you that one time, I have had my lesson and my punishment, and the thing would never occur again?" She considered a moment and slowly shook her head.

"You do not know yourself, Ivan," she said. "If you had it to do over again, it would be just the same."

"Try me," he insisted sturdily. "I hold you before everything else in life." She looked at him curiously with searching eyes.

"What would you do for me," she said, "if I should ask it?"

"There is nothing I would not attempt. What is it that you wish?" She waited again as if deciding whether, in the asking, she was yielding him too much. Then, with a face that was frankly troubled she turned to him.

"My father is going to send me back to Russia," she said. "If I should ask it, would you help me to get away and take me to my sister in Ltua?" The young man could have shouted in his joy that she should wish to stay.

"Will I help you?" he declared radiantly. "The whole thing shall be arranged for you tonight."

"No," returned the girl quickly, "if the start is to be made it must be done this afternoon!"

"But I can not!" he said in some dismay. "Until dark I have been set here on parole." The girl's face hardened and she made a contemptuous motion with her hands.

"Did not I tell you, Ivan?" she said ironically. "It was the old promise that you made, of more than you are willing to perform."

"But what difference can it make!" cried the young man protestingly.

"This at least," she said, "that as a test you invited me to ask of you that which I would most rather have you do. It is the one thing on which I have set my heart." Ivan Egorovitch's face grew graver and he fairly wrung his hands.

"You are asking me to do as a reparation," he said scornfully, "the very thing which, when you thought I had done it toward you, you found an unforgivable offense. I have never broken my word with any one, and how can I do it now with Aleksander Nicolaievitch, who has been to me so very kind?"

The girl's wilfulness began to sparkle into anger under his continued opposition to her will. There was a touch of her father's obstinacy in her disposition, and while in testing his love she had only thought to make him suffer becomingly before yielding to his suit, she found this sudden obstacle make the way to reconciliation much more hard.

"There is another reason, and a good one," she said loftily, "but I took your word that to have you do a thing I had only to express it as a wish."

"That is true," he said doggedly, "but, be-

lieving that you loved me, it never occurred to me in promising, that in the asking you would not hold my honor as your own.'' The girl's face crimsoned, and he could see the tears start in her eyes.

''Then you will not do it?'' she said, speaking scarcely above a whisper.

''I have no choice,'' he answered simply. ''If it were to help another it might perhaps be done. But where the benefit would be for myself it would be for me a crime!''

''Oh, you must do it! You must!'' she cried with sudden passionate abandon. ''You will lose me, Ivan, if you do not take me away this afternoon.''

''God help me, then!'' he said. ''I can not do it!'' She gave a little sob and turned away from him. He thought she was going without a word, but after a moment she came back to him and stretched out her hand.

''Good-by,'' she said, with tremulous softness.

''Good-by,'' he answered mechanically, and waited dully to see what she would do. For all her preparation, she could not bring herself to go, and lingered irresolutely with her hand in his. The fear began to grow in her that, after

all, she could not bend him to her will, and the fierce necessity of doing this, if she were not to lose him for all time, stirred her to something near to desperation.

"Ivan," she said after a moment's silence, "if it were to help another, would it make it easier for you to break your word and go?"

"That would depend," he said cautiously, "both on the person and the need." She drew closer to him and put her other hand caressingly upon his breast.

"Is it not enough that it is my happiness that is in the balance?" she entreated. "Surely you would do for me what you would do for another." The young man groaned in his embarrassment and lifted her fingers reverently to his lips.

"I would do anything for you that was right," he said brokenly. "But can you not see that in helping you to your happiness I should only be helping myself to my own?" She was manifestly disappointed and hastily drew away her hands.

"Why are you so sure of that?" she said with well-assumed coolness. "You are not the only one in Ltua who would be glad to see me

back." Ivan Egorovitch's face darkened and he shut his teeth together with a snap.

"Then it was true," he said sneeringly, "that you encouraged Stepan Dmitrievitch the day you came away!"

"Perhaps," she said demurely. "Why should I not, if I chose?"

"Because," he almost shouted, "you belong to me, and I will not have you looking at any other man!" She listened to his pronouncement with a little sigh of content. She was surer of her ground now and waited gravely till he was in calmer mood.

"Softly," she cried. "You forget that just this moment you gave me up and were going to let me go away." He looked at her in bewilderment, and then sat down and covered his face with his hands.

"Go!" he said; "go! You are tempting me beyond my strength." The girl's eyes glistened with a sudden access of tenderness, but with an effort she held herself in check.

"Stepan Dmitrievitch," she demanded, "was he at Ltua when you came away?" Ivan Egorovitch nodded without raising his head.

"Why did he not come to Yakutat? He told

me that he would." The young man writhed under the examination, but he was honest enough to tell her the whole truth.

"We could not both come," he said sullenly, "and he was the one who stayed."

"Then he stood aside for you?" she persisted.

"Yes," he admitted. "He stood aside for me."

"Poor Stepan!" she said softly, and watched to see how he would take the words. "Was there no message?" she continued. "Did he send no word to me?" Ivan Egorovitch waited before answering, till he could hold his voice under command.

"Yes," he admitted, "there was a letter."

"A letter?" she repeated with genuine surprise. "Why then have you not given it to me?"

"Because," he answered moodily, "there are things in it I could not bear to have you see!"

"You know then what is in it?" she asked with increased surprise.

"Yes," he said doggedly, "he told me what was in it before he put it in my hand." Motrya Petrovna felt a curious resentment as she listened to his words. She was so sure in

her heart that she belonged to him, that it came as a dishonor, that he should let another even think to send her messages of love, and for a moment she forgot entirely the part she had in hand.

"You let him give you a letter that you knew made love to me!" she cried, and there was almost horror in her tone. "And you have kept it in your pocket for two days?" Her change of tone was so compelling that Ivan Egorovitch raised his head.

"Yes," he said dully, "it was the only way I could get him to stay behind." Motrya Petrovna recovered herself almost instantly and held out her hand.

"Well, give it to me!" she said with a little hysteric laugh, but Ivan Egorovitch shook his head.

"No," he said drearily, "I was not to give it to you, till I had surely lost all hope." Again there was the gleam of pity in Motrya Petrovna's eyes and she made an involuntary movement as if to go to him. But the game was too near the end now to be abandoned for a whim and she steadied herself for the closing scene.

"Then surely," she said at last, "there is no longer reason for delay." He made no movement toward compliance, but sat dumbly staring at the ground.

"Give it to me at once!" she commanded, stamping her foot to emphasize her claim. "I demand it as a right!"

He hesitated a moment longer and then, putting his hand inside his blouse, he drew out the packet and gave it to her without a word. Then, rising, he turned his back to her and went as far away as possible, that he might not see her as she read. She stood with the letter in her hand, as she had taken it, and watched him with her eyes wet with tears. She made no effort to open the packet and, after a moment, with a stealthy movement, as if in fear that he would see her, placed it unread within the bosom of her dress. Then, after a brief interval, she spoke to the dejected figure on the stump.

"Ivan," she said, and in spite of her, her voice trembled so that she was fearful he would understand. "If I should ask you to keep your promise to Stepan Dmitrievitch and take me to him to-day, would you do it?"

He gave a little sob at the question, but did not turn around.

"I could not," he said huskily. "And besides, where is the need?"

"Listen," she said. "I wish to tell you now my other reason. The vessel there sails to-day at six o'clock and unless I go before that time it will be too late." He straightened himself as if he had been struck and turned to her at once.

"Why did you not tell me that at first?" he demanded resentfully. She felt her pulses leap as she saw how her diplomacy was bringing her success. Her impulse was to tell the truth and trust his heart to overcome his head. But there still lingered in her the warning dread lest all his scruples should not yet be set aside and she found strength to go on with her deception to the end.

"What matters it," she said, "now that you know the need?"

"If I had known it," he returned resentfully, "I might have taken you for myself." She held up her hand in interruption.

"Do not mistake," she cried warningly. "It is not for you that I am seeking it. Will you for Stepan Dmitrievitch's sake—and mine—

take me to Ltua as I have asked?" He hesitated a moment only and then stepped down from the stump.

"I am beaten!" he said querulously. "I will go with you where you will."

CHAPTER XIV

THE FLIGHT

She took him by the hand and drew him back among the thicker growth of trees and, skirting round the little group of houses so that no one in the settlement might see, they came presently to the edge of the timber and the beach. Ivan Egorovitch moved as in a dream and let her lead him anywhere she would.

She had chosen a point of refuge out toward the southern headland, at the farthest end of the sharp bight that limits with its curve the inner harbor line. Her eyes were full of the elation of her victory and she assumed control with the certainty of one whose authority is generously assured. Arrived at the water, she stood for a moment looking up and down, and then drew back to a sheltered place against a little bluff.

"Wait here," she said, "I think I know a man who will furnish us a boat." He sat down on

the ground without a word, and with a smile of encouragement, which failed to bring from him equivalent response, she left him and went swiftly off along the beach.

He watched her dully, till she was out of sight, and then drew in his glance in passive apathy, until it compassed a field of vision no wider than the sand-waves at his feet. He had come to the end of his tether for the time and, with the restraint of it dragging unremittingly at his heart, felt that the strings of his activity were loosened so he could touch them, for the present, to no harmonious accord.

But though the warm sunshine, the play of light on the blue levels of the bay and the cheerful noises of the loading ship brought no stir of interest to his light-blinded eyes, within him, like the settings in a play, there ran and shifted, with kaleidoscopic swiftness, the tragic groupings of the events of the last few days.

He felt again the soft touch on his lips that had betrayed him into Motrya's father's hands. He saw the girl's wild flight in the madness of her first unreasoning distaste. He burned with the recollection of Stepan Dmitrievitch's unwelcome love. But, most of all, in the very

porches of his ears, there stirred, like a whir of bees, the cut and play of that last dialogue that had stripped away the shams of hope and happiness that he had so carefully built up and left him, after it had passed, high stranded above the sea of active purpose, with nothing but his bits of wreckage round him in the sand.

He had lost the woman he loved—that was the staggering weight which was holding down the world. And it was an irony to him, that for all his struggle to comprehend why the catastrophe had fallen as it had, there still remained to him a baffling sense of ignorance as to how it all had come about. It was a further irony, too, that, having lost Motrya Petrovna for himself, chance should have put on him the bitter burden of saving her simply that she might make a Heaven for another man.

And yet, in all his blind lashing out at fate, it did not come to him to think that he could fail her in her need. To the engrossing fondness of his passion it seemed better to be near her even when she proved unkind, rather than somewhere else where her face would be hidden from him and he could no longer catch the inspiration of her look. And more than this,

down in the inner holy of his heart, there burned, like a sacred fire, that real love for the mate whom he had sought, which made it binding on him to seek happiness for her, no matter at what trouble to himself.

Over and over, he went groping round the walls of this black mental prison, feeling with eager hands each bar and stone, in pathetic hope that he would find some turning slab, some loosened bolt, some unexpected outlet toward escape. He was still moving blindly in the perplexing round, when he felt a touch on his shoulder, and, rising with a start, saw through his confusion that she had come back and was standing at his side. Behind her was a short man, half of native blood, who stood looking from her to him with an air of shrewd good humor that was at once quizzical and kind.

"This is Piotr Ivanovitch Shakhof," she said, "and he has found for us a boat." The newcomer bowed low to Ivan Egorovitch, lifting his cap with both hands.

"It is a ticklish business," he said outspokenly, "and one which, like as not, will bring me under the law—to say nothing of the loss, if by any chance, you should fail to return the

boat. But sympathy is stronger than prudence in a man, and if I were in your place I should ask no less myself."

He bowed again to Ivan Egorovitch with a sidewise sweep in the direction of Motrya Petrovna, so as to include her in the expression of his respect. Then, as the young man did not answer, but continued to stand and look at him with abstracted eyes, his expression changed to one of curiosity and he turned inquiringly to the waiting girl.

"You know your own taste, *panna,*" he said with appalling frankness, "but if I had been choosing for you, I should have picked a lover with more fire." The girl gave a mischievous glance at Ivan Egorovitch and made answer with a laugh.

"Appearances are deceitful, Piotr Ivanovitch, and I am very well satisfied with my companion as he is. He will tell you, however, that he is not my lover, but is taking me to my sister at the Ltua post." The man looked doubtfully at Ivan Egorovitch and once again with open admiration at the girl.

"It is a handsome service for a friend to give," he said bluntly. "If I did it, I should

surely ask for more reward." Ivan Egorovitch awoke to sudden animation and with rough directness set the man's pleasantries aside.

"Where is the boat?" he demanded abruptly. "Have you seen that all things are prepared?"

"Yes," answered Motrya Petrovna. "The boat is below there at the beach. But, for fear of interruption, Piotr Ivanovitch is to take it out to the very point yonder and we will go by land until we meet him there."

She sent the man on his errand and stood read for the start. She did not take her companion's hand as when they had first set out, but, assuring herself by a glance that he had caught the impulse and was close at her heels, she plunged into the covert and, like a gray shadow in the deep greenery around her, went flitting on before him, choosing the way.

Twice, when she had gone so quickly that the pace had carried her too far ahead, she stopped and waited, watching him with wistful eyes. But more than once, when some delaying detail had held her till he came up close behind, a sudden panic took her lest he should fail in his control and seize her with a detaining hand, and with fluttering heart she hastened to put

space again between her and him. They found the boatman punctual at his post and all things ready for a propitious start.

"I have brought covers and food and water," said the man, with a gesture toward the boat, "and there is an extra paddle should the other break." Motrya Petrovna drew him to one side and pressed some silver coins into his hand.

"You have done me great service," she said earnestly, "and I shall not forget you all my life." The man looked awkwardly at the money in his hand.

"It was not for that I did it," he said with some constraint, "but because you have been kind to me and mine. I wish you well with all my heart, but I should feel easier about you, if God would touch your man yonder to make him quicker with his wits."

"Perhaps he will," she said softly, with a sudden dewy compunction in her eyes, "though I do not find him hopeless as he is." The man held the canoe firmly while she arranged herself in comfort at the bow; and further till Ivan Egorovitch had knelt in the paddler's place.

"God keep you!" he cried, "and be sure and return the boat." He pushed them from the

shore and stood and felt his measure of the departing man enlarge, as he watched his back bend to the work and saw the clean dip of the paddle that betrayed the practised hand. It was only for a moment, however, that he saw; for a score of strokes carried the voyagers out to the rocky point and, with a sweep that marked a long white circle on the sea, they swung around it and were out of sight.

There is a balm of healing in familiar toil that brings a real restorative to troubled hearts. Ivan Egorovitch, bending fiercely to his work, felt its amenities relax the tenseness of the cords that bound his soul and send the warm blood tingling through the half-numbed channels of his nerves. The firm pull of the paddle in his hand, the flash of the blade, the sense of exhilarant motion, the lap of the water underneath his feet, and, perhaps more than all other things, the feeling of escape, of freedom, that came with the swift dash out into the open sea —all touched his spirits with an anodyne that cured his pain and led him all unconscious back toward peace.

He did not speak to the girl in the bow and she, with a great sympathy in her heart, sat

silent and watched his fight to seize again his former soul-serenity. It had not been her plan, when she began, to hold him at a distance from her long. But now, when his surrender was an accomplished fact and there was no longer need to let him think he had lost her love, a sudden shyness came to stop her mouth and make her ponder on the disclosure of her deception with a feminine alarm.

"I will delay," she said almost aloud. "It will be time when he has brought me home." But this panic aside, she found no shadow set on her content. The air was warm, the wind of the going moved pleasantly about her hair, the peace of all the ages seemed gathered down on the silent sea and the long lane of silver light, which the slanting sun sent shimmering across the waves, was like an open path to Arcady.

She lost herself in the dreams that held her thoughts and, with her hand drawn idly in the water at her side, went out along her airy road with a sublime carelessness and faith. How far she wandered there, no man can tell, but suddenly, through her dreaming, she was aware of something that broke in on the illusion she had

spun, and brought her rudely back to the real facts of life.

At first she felt it vaguely and only as a shock. But gathering force of it to more enduring clearness, she perceived that the man in front of her had ceased to paddle and was leaning forward to gaze at her with a face radiant with hope. So sure he was and so urgent of his claim, that her mind, dismayed, fled back into itself to question if in any way it could have given him the ground. And like a guilty flash, it came to her that in her reverie her face had caught reflection from the thought that was within and that, unconscious, she had looked at him with wooing eyes.

"Motrya," he whispered huskily, "is it really true?" She stirred with a sudden thrill of her old panic and looked at him aghast.

"I must have been asleep," she said. "Why have you ceased to row?" He kept his eyes on her unsteadily and made some inarticulate response. But, catching from her face that he had made mistake, he let his eyes go down and turned to his work again with passionate intensity.

They went on steadily and swiftly in their

course and the sun sank down till with a sudden dip it dropped into the sea. The girl began to be tired with the long sitting in one place, and slipping down she lay at full length on her covers and stretched herself to ease the stiffness in her limbs. Her feet almost reached Ivan Egorovitch where he knelt and she felt a wild desire rise in her to touch him and see what he would do. But before the thought had crystallized into act, he noted her change of place and moved so that the drip of the paddle as he passed it back and forth should not, in going, fall on her feet.

She abandoned her madcap thought and, settling herself in comfort in her place, lay back and watched the soft outgoing of the day. There were no high-riding clouds above her head to catch the colors and give back gorgeous sunset hues. Here and there small orange patches no larger than a hand glowed bright against the sallow sky. Along the horizon to the west, the mist, low-lying, caught a hard gilding from the sun and flamed and burned with royal prodigality. The whole air seized the impulse and grew full of the soft yellow light, and off to the east, even the somber mountains

of the mainland caught the kindliness of the benediction and warmed and softened into pleasant tints.

The evening wind began and breathed with slight premonitory chill. She felt, rather than saw, that Ivan Egorovitch leaned forward and drew a wrap across her as she lay. The sunset faded, how she scarcely knew, and when she woke again the canoe was beached on a low spit of land and Ivan Egorovitch was calling her to come ashore. The night had settled blackly and the hills, drawn close, went sharply up like a threatening shadow, indistinct and vague. Some steps away she saw the flash of a little fire, and the wind brought to her pleasantly the homelike smell of smoke.

She let him help her to her feet and went stumbling out upon the beach. Still heavy-eyed with sleep, she was confused and lost in the strange shadowy darkness, and, pressing her hands to her eyes, she stood still and waited till her power of judgment should again be clear.

"Come to the fire," he said. "It is only a little way." His voice supplied the human touch that was needful to harmonize her disturbed sense with the unusual scene. He, at

least, was a reality, on which her necessity might lean and with an unconsciousness that showed how natural the gesture was, she turned to him and put her hand in his.

The intimacy of the action stirred him almost beyond his strength. It was the first kindness Motrya Petrovna had shown him since the day when everything had been his own and, though he knew the trust was all unconscious, it was encouragement enough to set his pulse a-thrill.

"Do not be afraid," he said with a new note in his voice. "The way is steep, but it is wholly clear." She let him lead her up the short incline and came with him to a cup-shaped depression with a floor of turf in which the fire had been placed.

The blaze was larger, seen close at hand, and served to light acceptably the little level of the valley floor. She saw that he had been some time before her in the place and that, within the circle of the blaze, were set the various articles of food that Piotr Shakhof had so thoughtfully supplied. Ivan Egorovitch paused beside them, but still held her hand.

"This is the place where the boats always stop," he said. "There is water yonder, by that

little bush. I will go down and bring the other things, and by that time I think you can have some tea." There did not seem to be need for speech and she stood and smiled at him and waited till he should let go her hand. When he was gone, she watched him out of sight, and then went to the little stream that he had pointed out and washed and dried her face and arranged her tumbled hair.

He found her by the fire, awaiting him with kindly eyes. He placed on the ground the covers he had brought and arranged a pile of them against a convenient rock.

"Sit here," he said, "where you will not be cold."

"You must come, too," she said, and left for him a place.

"Not now," he answered. "Not till you are served." He brought her food and tea and saw that she had comfort while she ate. But when the meal was done, he took advantage of the invitation she had given and stretched himself on the covers at her side.

It was a strain on his self-mastery to keep from speaking all his thought. She was so near that he could have put out his hand and touched

her, but his heart was grateful that she had thrown to him even the small crumbs of comfort that she had, and he put a grip on himself that she might not feel she had been mistaken in her trust.

The girl herself, now she had led him on, was filled with fear lest she should give too much and so took refuge in a passive rôle and sat and watched the fire and did not speak. His eyes devoured her hungrily and at last he could not keep his thoughts from breaking into words.

"God made this place for us," he said with a low thrill of voice. "I do not believe there is any one else left in the world." The girl gave an almost imperceptible stir of discontent.

"Do not talk," she said pleadingly; "let us enjoy it as it is."

"I can not," he said passionately, "I must show you what is in my heart." She reached out quickly and laid her hand lightly on his mouth.

"Oh, wait!" she cried. "I do not want to hear to-night." The touch of her soft palm, the warmth of it—more than he had so long possessed of her—intoxicated him for the moment and swept away the last restraint of his reserve.

He pressed the hand hungrily against his cheek, kissed it with feverish lips and, lifting himself, drew her toward him with the thought to take her in his arms. She resisted sharply, throwing back her head and pushed him from her with her hands.

"Wait!" she cried, "wait! O Ivan, not to-night!" He yielded promptly to her mood and gave back until she was entirely free. She sat for some minutes rigidly against the rock, watching him constantly with attentive eyes.

"I am trusting you, Ivan," she said tremulously. "Do not do anything that will make me sorry that I have!" He got abruptly to his feet and without a word went swiftly out of the little valley by the path down to the sea.

When he came back he was again quiet and contained, and taking a cover, arranged it over slanting sticks so as to make her a shelter by a fallen fir. She stood by the fire and watched him while he arranged the remaining wraps into a bed.

"It is near midnight," he said, "and time you were asleep."

"And you?" she answered.

"I shall sleep in the canoe," he said, and went

away, across the little hill. He did not go to bed at once, however, but, standing by the boat, took off his cap and lingered, enjoying on his forehead the coolness of the soft evening breeze.

It was a lovely night. The penetrating chill that commonly came in with darkness was this time lacking. The place was still, except for the soft lapping of the surf along the beach line. The darkness hung around him like a veil let down to shut out everything but the wide mysteries of night, and, standing with upraised face, he drank in the inspiration of its quiet and felt himself uplifted by its peace.

But only for a moment. There was a sudden breathing of the forest. Somewhere a fox barked sharply from its cover, and off to the south a glacier in some hidden bay, let fall, with sullen roar, a front of ice into the sea. It brought him to himself and, with a deep-drawn sigh, he replaced his cap and turned and looked back wistfully toward the fire. But the inspiration of the night remained in him and would not let him rest. Climbing the hill, he passed the fire and stood again beside the shelter tent.

"Motrya," he called, "are you asleep?"

"No, not yet," she said after a moment's hesitation.

"I could not sleep," he went on humbly, "till I had told you that I was sorry I went too far. Good night!"

"Good night!" she answered softly and again the place was still. He did not go, however, and, divining what he wanted, after a moment, she put out her hand. He kissed it reverently and let it go, and this time when he went away, she came to sleep that was not any more disturbed.

CHAPTER XV

THE GRIP OF THE DRAW

The sun was shining brightly when Motrya Petrovna woke and, hastily making her toilet at the little run, she looked for Ivan Egorovitch and saw him at the top of one of the larger of the adjacent hills. She went to him and found him looking out across the sea. So engrossed was he in his occupation that until she spoke, he did not seem to see or to hear her.

"What is it, Ivan?" she asked breathlessly, for the incline was steep. He kept his gaze fixed as before and, without turning, pointed with his hand.

"It is a boat, I think," he said quietly. "Do you see it yonder by that farthest rocky point?" She came close to him and bent forward in the direction he had shown.

"Is it that black dot in the water, near the shore?"

"Yes, now it is gone behind that island to the

left." She stood so close to him that she brushed his arm, but he was so preoccupied he still scarcely knew that she was there by his side.

"What does it mean?" she asked with a sudden thrill.

"Pursuit, I am afraid," he answered soberly. "See, there it comes in sight again." They watched it silently for a moment and Motrya Petrovna felt a new stir at the heart. Then, with an exclamation, Ivan Egorovitch came out of his absorption and turned abruptly to the girl at his side.

"We will take no chance," he said decidedly. "We must lose no time in getting under way." He put his arm around her as if it was already necessary to protect her against the danger that he feared, and together they went swiftly down the slope.

As a first measure of precaution, he put out the fire. They ate and drank with feverish haste and then, with the leisurely swiftness of long practice, the young man collected the scattered things and loaded them quickly on the canoe. Before starting, he went back to the hill for another look.

"It is a larger boat," he said when he came back, "and I think there are four men."

"Ours is the lighter one," she said encouragingly.

"Yes," he answered, "but they can cut straight across from head to head, while we, being smaller, have to hug the shore."

He helped her to her place and got the little craft afloat and, putting his back into the work, began to send it across the water with satisfying speed. Seated at the bow, Motrya Petrovna could look back on the course which they had followed, and with growing curiosity she strained her eyes to catch a glimpse of the boat that followed them. She was too close to the water for extended view and, in spite of her efforts, she could get no sight of it. Again and again in the long morning hours she thought she made it out, and once she raised herself so far in her eagerness to see, that the little canoe shook violently and Ivan Egorovitch became aware of her.

"Sit down!" he said sharply. "You will be over in the sea." She settled back obediently in her place, but turned her eyes to him in mute apology.

"I thought I saw them!" she said breathlessly." "Do you think they will overhaul us before we can get in?"

"I trust not," he answered dubiously. "If they take us here, they can do with us as they will, but if we gain the port, it is a certain thing that they will not be able to lay hands on us."

"It is a strange thing that they have followed us so soon," she said thoughtfully, "and I can not understand why they have brought so large a boat."

"I suspect you are more precious to your father than you know," he answered with a smile. "They have brought the larger boat because they want me as well as you. You forget that I am an offender now who has broken gaol. The priest desires me punished and Aleksander Nicolaievitch has had to send the extra men." This was a new idea to her, and a disturbing one, and she clasped her hands impulsively as she thought it out.

"Oh, they must not overtake us!" she cried excitedly. "I could not bear to have you suffer for what I made you do!"

"We shall know about it soon," he answered. "The end of the journey is not far away."

He stopped paddling and took a quick look down along the coast. Less than three miles away he saw the familiar headlands that marked the desired entrance to Ltua Bay and unconsciously he gave a little shout of joy. But the girl, looking back, had at the same moment her first vision of their pursuers as their boat rose suddenly on the crest of a higher wave. With a gasp, she let herself slide down into the bottom of the boat and drew herself toward him as if she could not resist the impulse to help him at the oar.

"Pull!" she cried in a sibilant whisper, "pull, Ivan, they are almost here!" The young man caught the impulse of her terror and bent with hysteric energy to his work. But, after a moment, finding that they had not been overhauled, he steadied his courage and took time to look around.

"I thought they were right upon us," he said shamefacedly, and eased up somewhat on his stroke. The other canoe, however, was now plainly in sight and he could see that, as he had thought, it held four men.

Those in the pursuing boat saw the fugitives almost as soon as they themselves had been seen,

and one man stood up and gazed at them fixedly, as if to make assurance doubly sure. Then his hands went to his mouth and he shouted a sharp peremptory hail. Ivan Egorovitch did not answer and the girl gave a little sob and covered her face with her hands. The young man did not dare to lay down his paddle to go to her, but from his distance, he comforted her as he could.

"Courage, dear heart," he said. "There is a long way yet between them and us." She looked up at him thankfully with a perfunctory effort at a smile.

"It is foolish, I suppose, to be so frightened," she said tremulously, "but I would not want to live, Ivan, if you let them take me from you now." His face lighted and he gave her a quick grateful glance.

"God Himself might do it," he cried magnificently, "but while I live, I will hold you against the world!" Still, his heart beat freer when they had passed between the headlands and their pursuers were for the moment out of sight.

His enthusiasm carried him quickly and he was well in the channel before he thought about the draw. It may have been the sinister drag

on the boat or perhaps some suggestive stir of the surface of the sea. But whatever it was, he woke suddenly to recollection and saw that the tide was past the full, and ahead of him the mad spin of the water was beginning to go round.

He checked the canoe promptly, with the thought to turn and make for the landing at the outer point. But that refuge looked already an interminable way behind and the fear took hold of him that to go back would mean to run surely into their pursuers' arms.

"Motrya," he cried, "the tide has turned and the passage is not safe. Shall we go back or shall we try to run the draw?" The girl twisted herself around so she could look up the channel toward the designated spot and saw at once that there was no doubt of the truth of what he had said. There was the same restless stir of the water that she had noticed the day when he had first shown her the whirlpool from the ledge, and at the center of the uncanny thing, she saw the old angry patch of white that heaved and stirred as if it were alive.

Like an overwhelming wave there swept over her the whole recollection of the place as she

had seen it on that other dreadful day. She felt again on her hands the sinister pull of the log at the end of the tight-stretched rope. She heard the cry of the priest as he dropped from his boat into the inhospitable sea, and saw, as in a dream, the two black heads go up and down like corks in the struggle of the men for life.

It was all in an instant, but the horror of it took her strength and as she turned to him again he saw in her face that she had not the heart to try. It was not the answer he had hoped for, but without a word, he turned the canoe and began to circle for the backward run. But before it was fairly round, the girl, turning to gage the danger from the other boat, saw it so near that she could not suppress a cry.

"Wait!" she exclaimed. "They are already at the point!" He checked the boat and as she saw the hope that was in his eyes, she steadied herself and took new grip on her fears.

"Ivan," she cried, "is there a chance that we could pass alive?"

"Yes," he answered, "there is a chance, but that is all." She hesitated just a moment, while her courage grew.

"Go on!" she said resolutely. "It will be no

worse than going back!" He delayed no time in acting on the permission and sent the boat over to the southern bank. Hugging it close, he increased the speed so that as far as possible he should offset the insidious grapple of the draw.

Motrya Petrovna let herself sink into the bottom of the boat and covered her eyes tightly with her hands. For the first hundred yards the plan worked like a charm. The boat obeyed the paddle and crept steadily along the rocky wall. But after that the racing water began to drag at it with growing force and Ivan Egorovitch found it hard to keep it pointed as he would. So strong was the unremitting pull that it was only by paddling wholly on one side, that he could keep the boat's nose turned rightly toward the shore.

The crisis came when they were opposite the ledge. Slowly, but surely, the boat began to leave the sheltering cliff, moving broadsides out into the stream. Ivan Egorovitch paddled madly, but to no avail, and saw the shore slip away until there was a wide lane of water between him and it. Motrya Petrovna had slid forward in a heap and he saw that she had fainted quite away.

It took him but a moment to make up his mind. With a last desperate struggle that he might not lose advantage while he leaned forward to the girl, he threw away his paddle and leaped with her as far as possible toward the shore. The sudden plunge restored somewhat her dormant wits but she did not resist strongly and his task was the easier that he could manage her as he would.

It was a wild struggle and a bitter one and, more than once, with the mad swirl of the current sucking at his legs, he thought the end had come and that his strength was not enough to bring him out. But he fought with dogged perseverance, gaining inch by inch, and finally, with hand that was so weary he could scarcely keep the hold, grasped at the rock where once before his landing had been made, and drew himself and her out on the ledge.

He was so weak that, having dragged her back against the bank, he fell beside her and lay, panting, on the rock. He had no wish to stir, and with his hand stretched out to touch the girl whom he had saved, he rested, conscious only of a growing sense of satisfaction and content.

It was only for a moment, however, for be-

fore his heart had slowed to its ordinary beat, there was a sudden cry out in the channel that startled him and brought him quickly to his feet. He had forgotten about the others there behind and was suddenly conscious that they had followed into the open way and, unwitting, blundered on into the draw.

When he saw them they were already in the toils and laboring hard to turn aside their fate. They were too engrossed with their own struggle to see the fugitives upon the ledge, but Ivan Egorovitch saw that, besides the two who labored at the oars, the boat held Peter Efimovitch and Simeon Gvosdef, the priest.

The paddlers fought bravely for their lives, bending their backs till the muscles stood out like cords and did not waste breath in a single word. Peter Efimovitch stood up stiffly and watched the approach of the end, with unchanged face. But as the boat came to the edge of the central patch of foam, Simeon Gvosdef in his place at the bow leaned forward as if in fascination and, looking with horrow into the bubbling caldron, began dismally to scream.

The agony of the cry reached even the dull ear of the girl and she half-opened her eyes

and raised herself as if about to sit upright. Ivan Egorovitch, by a quick movement, placed himself between her and the sea.

"Don't look!" he cried, and covered her eyes with his hand. The intervention was unnecessary, for the girl's action was purely automatic and it is doubtful if she even heard him speak. Her head dropped back in spite of her desire and with a sigh she relapsed into unconsciousness again.

When he turned back to the water, the tragedy was almost done. The boat was floating on its side and, of its occupants, there was no sign except one stiff up-reaching arm. He watched in fascination, till the boat itself went down and, seizing the girl with almost frantic haste, he carried her swiftly up the narrow path and away from the morbid horror of the place.

Up on the level, where the sun was warm, he made a bed of grass where a high bush would shelter it from the wind, and, gathering her in his arms, so that her head lay against his breast, he waited patiently till she should come to life again. The heat and comfort wrought their perfect work and after a time she began to take deeper breaths and ended by opening her eyes.

She did not try to move or change her place, but lay contentedly and looked up into his face.

"Where are we, Ivan?" she said at last. "Did we come safely through the draw?"

"We are in the meadow where you picked the flowers," he said quietly. She considered for a moment without further speech. Then, moving back her head so that she might more clearly see his eyes, she spoke again.

"The others?" she said, "where are they?" He did not even hesitate.

"I do not know," he said. "They did not come in and pass the draw." She accepted the explanation without further question and with a sigh of satisfaction again closed her eyes. Ivan Egorovitch watched her with exultant pulse. Not even the tragic deaths he had just seen could hold in check the magic stir within his blood. The sureness of possession took hold on him and as the minutes passed and brought from her no signal of dissent, the impulse grew to make his title felt.

"Dear heart!" he said, and for an instant held her tight. She lifted her hand and ran it caressingly up along his breast.

"Do you understand now, Ivan?" she said

softly. The color flared up in his cheeks and, for the moment, even in the face of her complaisance, he was afraid to speak.

"I am not sure that I dare," he said constrainedly. "We have faced death together with a single heart. I hope it means that from this time forward we are to face life together with the same single heart and that you will let me hold you fast against the world."

"Hold me!" she said almost below her breath and, turning, hid her face against his breast.

CHAPTER XVI

IVAN IS BROUGHT TO BOOK

At the moment of its confession, love seems sufficient for all things to come, and Ivan Egorovitch, holding fast the woman he had acquired at such pains, forgot both time and place, and for an interval pictured himself no future outside of what he read in his companion's eyes. But the time comes inevitably when the intoxicating inspiration wavers and the mind again takes note of common things: and as the sun began to slant down westward toward the sea, the thoughts of the fugitives returned unconsciously to the world around them and the impulse woke to bring their adventure to a proper close. Motrya Petrovna was the first to put the feeling into words.

"What are we going to do, Ivan," she asked with some hesitation, "if no boat should come in through the channel before night?" He smiled at her encouragingly, but rose to his feet and let

his eyes run searchingly over the line of sea around him before he looked down at her once more.

"There will surely some one come," he said quietly. "But if no one did, it would only mean that we should have the long walk up to the native village on the beach." He continued to gaze at her almost wistfully for a moment and then dropped down on his knees beside her and took her hands in his.

"I believe I am still afraid to go back with you to the post," he said with some constraint. "Here the whole world is ours and we are all of it. But there I shall have to share you, in part at least, with Stepan and Tatiana and the rest. It disturbs me to give up even the little they will demand."

"But we shall be together just the same. Surely they can not separate us now." He drew up his shoulders as if in answer to her question, but in his eyes there was no real doubt.

"I shall never give you up, you may be sure," he said quietly. "What I really had in mind was that when I have left you with your sister, I shall miss you sorely till I can come to you again." She withdrew her hands from his in

a sudden panic of surprise and leaning forward caught him convulsively by the arms.

"What do you mean?" she cried. "Where are you going that you think to leave me here behind?"

"Have you forgotten," he answered, "that I have an account to settle with Aleksander Nicolaievitch at Yakutat for the breaking of my parole?"

She drew herself up to him till she could hide her head against his breast.

"If you go back, I shall go with you," she declared. He held her tightly to him and bent his head till his cheek rested lightly on her hair.

"No," he said gravely. "When I go I must go alone." She stirred protestingly but did not answer; and after a pause he added with a touch of mischief in his voice: "You see, it will be better to finish my punishment this time when once it is begun." She kept her face hidden close against his coat, but he could see the color flood her neck and cheeks, and she drew herself more closely down against his arm.

"It was dreadful of me, was it not?" she whispered. "But, Ivan, I did not see how to be sure of you in any other way."

"I can forgive you," he said softly, "and perhaps it is your part of the punishment that you will have to stay behind here and wait for me without knowing, till I come to you, what is to be the end." She considered silently and then raised her eyes steadily to his.

"I will let you go," she said with as much courage as she could bring herself to show,—"but, Ivan—what if my father should come and take me away again while you are gone?"

"How can he—" said the young man almost unconsciously. Then, recollecting that as yet the girl beside him knew nothing of that last tragedy of the draw, his speech halted and he looked at her guiltily to see if she had understood.

"I should have told you!" he began awkwardly and then again as suddenly he stopped.

"Tell me what?" she echoed. He was slow in finding words in which to answer her and in his engrossment his eyes went out unconsciously to the place in the channel where the pitiful accident had occurred.

"Peter Efimovitch—" he began vaguely, and then again found himself at a loss for words. Her eyes, however, had followed instinctively

the direction of his glance and there was that in his face that revealed to her at once the dreadful truth. She pushed back from him with a sudden stiffening of the figure till she could look into his eyes, and as a full understanding of the matter came to her, a shade of horror began to grow upon her face.

"Did you see it?" she cried sharply. "Is it then really true?" He drew her to him and pressed her head down again to his shoulder as if he were comforting a child.

"I could not help but see it," he said. "But this time it was not given to me to be of aid." She shivered at the explanation, but made no other sign. He could think of no adequate word of comfort and contented himself with holding her tightly in his arms till the first shock of her grief should pass.

For a space, she remained rigidly unresponsive to the sympathetic ministration, but in the end his silent sympathy made way with her, the tension of her poise relaxed and, with her face still buried on his shoulder, she began to cry quietly to herself. He was wise enough to leave her entirely to her thought, and for a long time they sat in silence while she steadied herself

through the help of his comforting kindness to a clearer comprehension of what was left to her in life. But even then the shadow of her loss hung black over her and it was a relief to Ivan Egorovitch when a passing boat paused at their signal of distress, and taking them aboard, made an end for him for a time to the strain of keeping her in heart.

She remained listless even under the excitement of the final coming home and it was only when the time came for the last parting with her lover that she regained her old lively interest in life. Then, the realization of what his departure meant took active hold on her and she clung to him as if his going were the only sorrow in the world.

"You will come back!" she whispered. "You will surely come to me again?" He held her tightly to him and comforted her as he could.

"How can you doubt it!" he said. "If I live, I will surely come."

"But when?" she demanded breathlessly. "Oh, you will not make it long!"

"Only as long as Aleksander Nicolaievitch gives command," he answered. "It rests with him what time he will demand." She caught her

breath as if she could not bear that he should speak of it, and bent her head so he could not see her face.

"It is my punishment, not yours, you are going there to take," she said shamefacedly. "You must tell him, Ivan, that it was not you but I who was at fault."

"The fault was no more yours than mine," he answered softly. "The wrong is done, but having got you by it, I am willing to go back and take whatever punishment he may demand. Aleksander Nicolaievitch has a heart, and I am sure that when he hears the story, I shall get mercy rather than justice at his hands." He kept up the same brave front with her until the end, but when Motrya Petrovna was left behind and he had time to think about the matter by himself, he found his confidence a less certain prop and recognized in himself a frank dismay which grew as he approached the place where he was going to be judged. Stepan Dmitrievitch had been absent when the fugitives reached the post; and that no time should be lost, Ivan Egorovitch had selected a canoe and four rowers for himself and set out at once on his return.

"Aleksander Nicolaievitch shall at least see that I lost no time in coming back," he said to himself in lame apology. He tried to frame excuses which would not halt in the delivery and grow futile in his mouth, but each time there came to him the recollection of the shrewd eyes of the commandant as they had rested on him before and he knew that he had nothing to offer that would stand the ordeal of their serious search.

It was, therefore, with something closely akin to panic in his heart that he stepped ashore at Yakutat and began his pilgrimage up to the commandant's abode. Aleksander Nicolaievitch was busy at his desk and, though he glanced up at Ivan Egorovitch as he made his way into the room, he turned again at once to the problem he had in hand and by his manner gave no hint of what was passing in his mind.

The young man raged inwardly at the delay, feeling with each moment his courage ooze unpleasantly away. The nervous strain played havoc with his steadiness of mind, and when his time came he started forward with all things in a whirl and with no settled plan as to what he should do or say. The commandant received

him gravely, but though his face was set, there was not the severity in it that the young man's consciousness of wrong-doing had led him to expect.

"So you are back again," he said shortly. "Did you forget that you were to come to me that other day after you had finished out there on the stump?" The young man flushed guiltily and his eyes went down to the floor.

"No, I did not forget," he said constrainedly, "but before the time came there arose a need—"

"I know," interrupted the commandant testily. "There was a girl. A young man always thinks that that is a full excuse!" The contemptuous sarcasm of the tone stung the lover in the young man to the quick and he defiantly raised his head.

"What could I do?" he burst out indignantly. "I should have lost her altogether if I had not gone with her that day!" The commandant let his breath out with a rush and struck the table sharply with his fist.

"How do you know that?" he cried. "Why is it that it never occurred to you to come to me?" The thought was so new a one to Ivan

Egorovitch that he stood in abashed confusion and gazed at Aleksander Nicolaievitch without a word. The commandant scarcely waited for an answer, but went on with his arraignment almost without a break.

"That is the way with you young men," he said. "You take no thought that there is any power above you as efficient as your own. And not you alone, but every other man about the post! You find a need to run off with a girl and, whisk! four more men leave their work and run after you to bring you back." The young man's face underwent a sudden transformation and his excitement brought him back again to speech.

"Then you did not send the others?" he burst out. "You did not know that they were gone?"

"Know it? How could I? Not one of you came even as a courtesy to ask leave!" The culprit's lips shut suddenly together lest, before he had taken a gage of the new conditions, he should speak and say too much. It had been so sure a thing to him that the priest's pursuit had been officially inspired that it came to him with the shock of a great surprise that his own lapse had never come to the ears of the commandant

at all. For a moment the temptation urged to hide his fault and so escape the punishment that was its due, but almost as quickly he set the thought sturdily aside and took the plunge which should purge him of the smirches on his soul.

"Then you did not know," he said huskily, "that I went away before my punishment was through?" The commandant's hand came down on the table with a bang.

"What!" he shouted, leaning forward and holding fast to the edges of the table to bring himself more near. "What is that you say?" The young man repeated his self-accusation with such composure as he could. Aleksander Nicolaievitch did not wait to hear him through, but jumped to his feet and leaning across the table, waved him vigorously toward the door.

"Then what are you doing here?" he cried. "Did I not tell you not to report to me until you had finished with your task?"

"But, your Well-born," faltered the young man, "I thought you would want to know—"

"I want to know nothing except that I am obeyed. Go back to your stump and stay there till your punishment is done!" With a final

wave of his hands he turned his back on the offender and waited in rigid disapprobation till his orders should be followed out. Ivan Egorovitch stood and looked at him in perplexed silence for a moment and then, with a bow that Aleksander Nicolaievitch did not see, went out through the door and betook himself to the place of punishment where he had first been sent.

He had not been there half an hour when he saw the spare figure of the commandant coming toward him from the doorway of his house. Ivan Egorovitch saluted him respectfully as he came up to the stump and waited in decent silence to hear why he had come.

Aleksander Nicolaievitch returned the salute gravely and, choosing a spot on an adjacent log, drew up his feet so that they would be out of the wet moss, and taking out his pipe, lighted it and began placidly to smoke.

"I felt that there must be a guard set over you if I was to be sure that you would stay," he said dryly, "and as there was no one else here who understood this matter besides us two, I saw no way except to come and be a guard myself." Ivan Egorovitch was not yet sure enough

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of his ground or his composure to venture on speech and so contented himself with bowing respectfully an assent. The commandant got around to talk again after a little, and, blowing out a cloud of smoke, turned his face to the young man with a deprecatory smile.

"There is nothing really derogatory, I suppose, in admitting that a man gets more or less womanish as he grows old," he said. "Can not you see that I am overwhelmed with curiosity to know what happened to you and to the girl? Tell me about it, man. Did you get clean away?" The last pound of the burden Ivan Egorovitch had been carrying slipped away from him at the word and it was only by an effort that he concealed the joy of his relief.

"There is not much to tell," he said with some self-consciousness, "but if you wish it, I will tell you what there is." In spite of this promise to be brief, he began at the beginning and related the whole story, from the trial of the first rupture on to the pleasant end. The commandant listened with all the gravity of a judge, smoking assiduously between the comments that he made and punctuating his silences with sym-

pathetic nods. He shook his head gravely at the story of the young man's temptation and fall from grace, and found a grim satisfaction in the priest's compensatory death. But when the young man came to the expounding of the final parting with Motrya on the beach, his listener warmed to a positive excitement and interrupted him before he was fairly done.

"In God's name, man!" he exclaimed. "You do not mean that after having had all this trouble in getting her, you did not marry her before you came away!" Ivan Egorovitch laughed softly.

"She will be there when I get back," he declared. "Besides, I could not then, because there was no priest." The old man grunted disapprovingly and skeptically shook his head.

"You never can be sure," he said. "I will lend you a priest and the best thing you can do is to take him and get back to her as quickly as you can. Why did you not bring her here, though?" he added ruefully. "Now I shall be out of it and I have not seen a wedding in two years." Ivan Egorovitch came as close to the commandant as his place of imprisonment would allow and eagerly stretched out his hands.

"Why do you not come with me to where she is?" he cried. "It is only a short journey and, if you will, I promise you that at the altar you shall be the one to hold her crown." Aleksander Nicolaievitch blew out a long stream of smoke and nodded placidly.

"I had been thinking about that myself," he said calmly, "and now that I have an invitation, I think it probable I shall accept. It will do no harm, anyway, to have a look at what you young people are doing at the post, and it will warm the cockles of my heart again to see a decent bride."

And so it happened that next morning as the east was growing white, two boats passed out through the headlands of the bay and began their voyage to the southern post. In one were the commandant and Ivan Egorovitch together with the rowers who had brought him north. In the other traveled the borrowed priest and two deacons whom Aleksander Nicolaievitch, in a moment of enthusiasm, had added, that the wedding should be sure of its proper pomp.

"We will have no question of the ceremony," he said loftily, "because the chanting was not rightly done." He was pleased as a child with

being best man to the bride and fretted with impatience every moment of the way.

"You will see," he said with somber pessimism. "It will never come off at all. She changed her mind after she promised you before, and even if we get there with these accursed boats, you will find that she has changed it on you once again." But Ivan Egorovitch was proof against such attacks and even the darkest of the old man's croakings failed to disturb the serenity of his faith.

"You will see," he answered him in turn, and utterly refused to give the matter further thought. The outcome proved the wisdom of his belief. When they had passed the channel heads and, crossing the great draw, come safely to the landing in the upper bay, they found Motrya Petrovna awaiting them on the shore. In her greeting of her lover, she gave so sure a testimony of a fixed and constant mind that even Aleksander Nicolaievitch found it right to purge her of inconstancy. When it was made known to her who the old man was, she went to him with outstretched hands.

"It was good of you to come," she said shyly. "I had wondered whom the Saints would

send to me to hold up my crown, and that you should come to do it is an honor which I shall be proud to tell of in the family for all time." Tatiana Vassilievna alone found fault with the choice.

"How will you look," she demanded scornfully of the commandant, "walking after her around the altar with your long whiskers and your red, bald head. It is a young man's place to attend upon my girl. You would not last till the time of the first circling and would have to have a helper to hold up your hands!" The abashed official swelled and reddened, but made no proffer of surrendering his claims.

"You will see!" he cried excitedly. "It will be time to talk about a helper when I let the crown go down. My beard may be white, but I am as young inside as if my nose was still wet with milk." But he took a warning from the ungracious taunt, and seizing a convenient moment took the priest privately aside.

"You have but two deacons for the chanting," he said with some embarrassment, "therefore it might be well to make the service short, for fear that otherwise they will become too tired." But when the wedding party stood before the

priest, both he and Tatiana Vassilievna forgot their differences and resigned themselves to sentimental absorption in the scene. Stepan Dmitrievitch held the second crown, but Aleksander Nicolaievitch's poise was no less firm than his, and the old man's excitement buoyed his spirits so that when the time came finally to set the crowns upon the couple's heads, he finished strong and gave his up with much of genuine regret.

It was to Stepan Dmitrievitch alone that the scene brought anything of grief. True to his bond, he had been the first to congratulate his blood-brother on his better luck. But all the day there was a shadow on his face he could not wholly hide and Motrya Petrovna noticed it with a sympathetic pang. She made no sign concerning it until the ceremony was done and she had been escorted in procession back to her sister's house. Then she stole a moment from her happiness to go and take him by the hands.

"I am sorry, Stepan," she said wistfully. "I think you know I would have liked to make you happy if I could." He looked her courageously in the eyes and tried to draw his lips into a smile.

"God bless you!" he said tremulously. "To hear you say so makes it easier for me to bear." He dared not trust himself to further speech, and, after devouring her hungrily for a moment with his eyes, he drew back from her abruptly and almost rudely took away his hands.

"You are a brave man and good," she said softly, but was not sure he heard her as he forced himself away. The word helped to this extent, however, that during the season of congratulations he was noticeably more gay, and at the dinner vied with the commandant in happy speeches to the bride.

But the strain told in the end, and when the rooms were cleared for dancing and at the head of the long chamber the tortured instruments began to drone, he took advantage of the general occupation and slipped quietly away. No one observed him as he passed to the little hallway and so out through the half-open door.

The wind on his face was restful after the closeness of the heated rooms and he stood for a moment gratefully drawing in the coolness and listening to the confused tread of the dancers and the voices within. Then the loneliness he had been fighting came down on him

with the darkness, and, leaning his arms against the doorpost, he let down his head upon them and gave himself up unreservedly to his grief.

But it is doubtful if either Ivan Egorovitch or his new-made wife took note that he went away. From the first they had moved among the dancers and responded to the talking with only a half heed for what was going on.

"I do not yet believe that it is true," he whispered to her once. "To-morrow you will be gone again and I shall be following you hopelessly all across the world."

"But you will follow?" she said with a shy upward glance.

"As long as I have life," he answered with a look that made her flush. But until the last guest was gone, he could not wholly set the foolish disbelief aside and the fear recurred so that when, momentarily, Motrya Petrovna strayed away from him in the room, the panic gripped him and let him have no rest till he had sought her out and come again close enough to her so that he could speak to her and touch her with his hand.

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